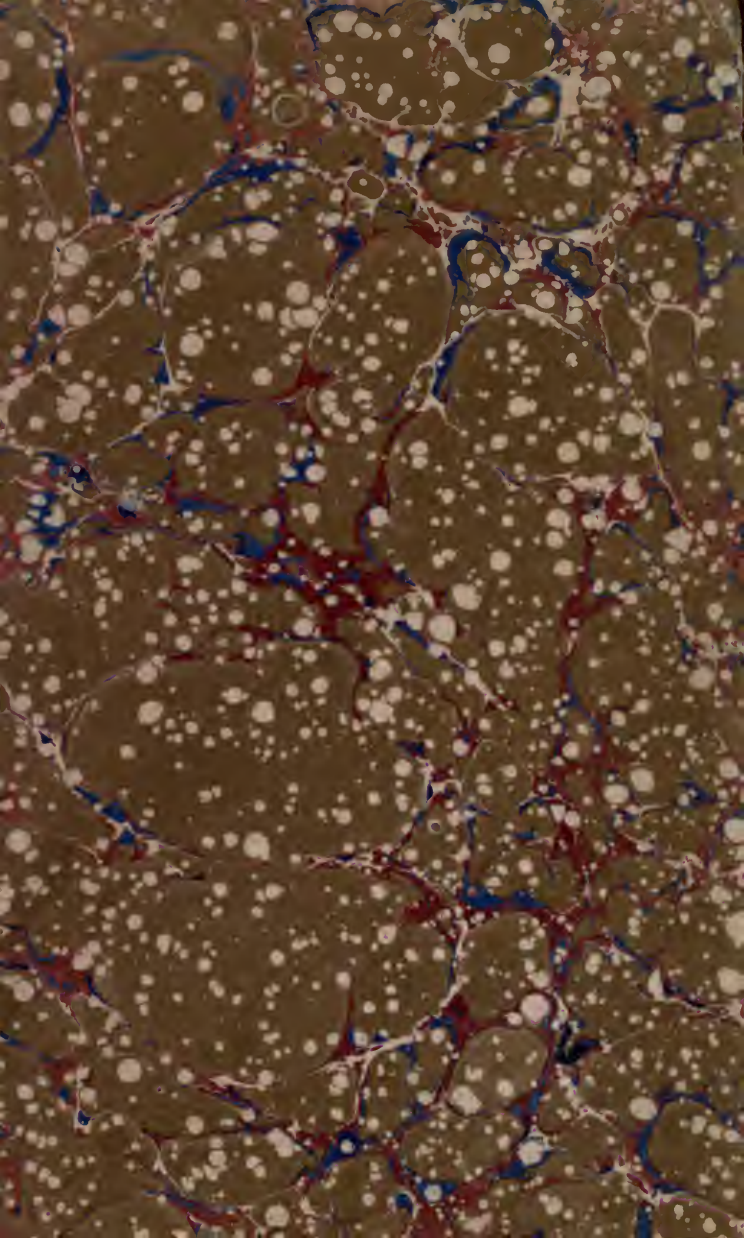
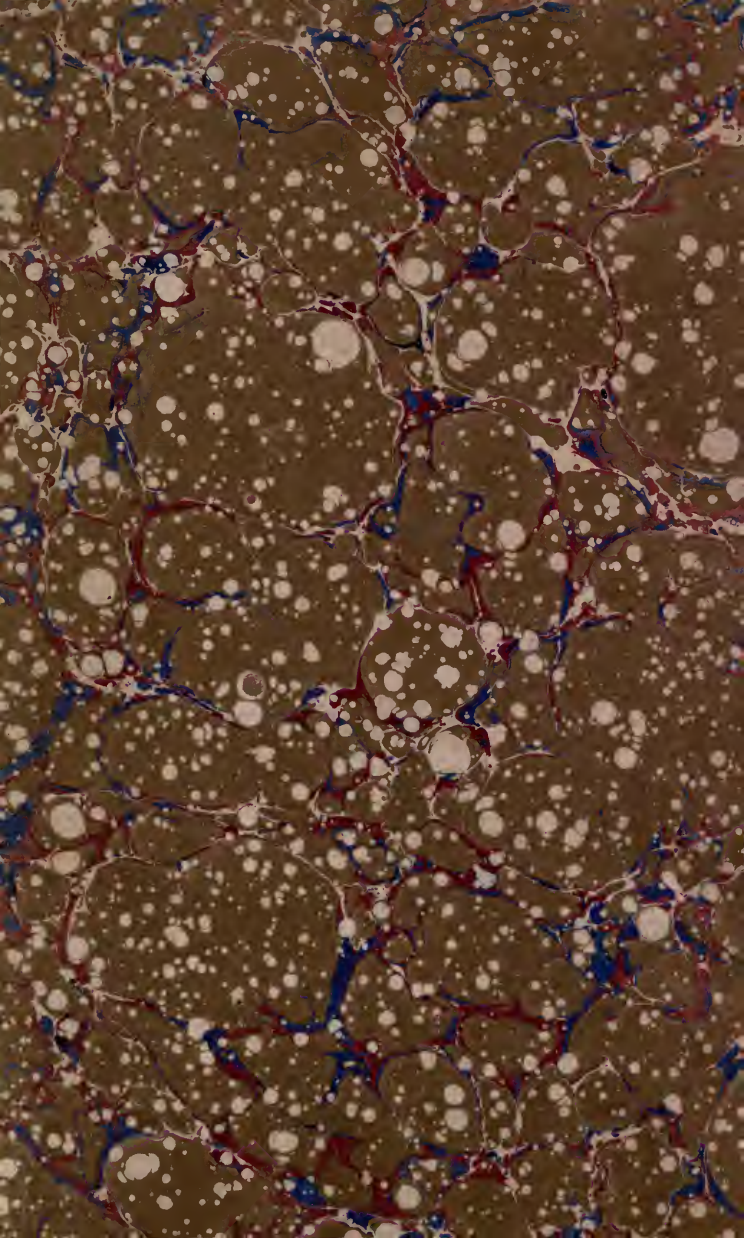


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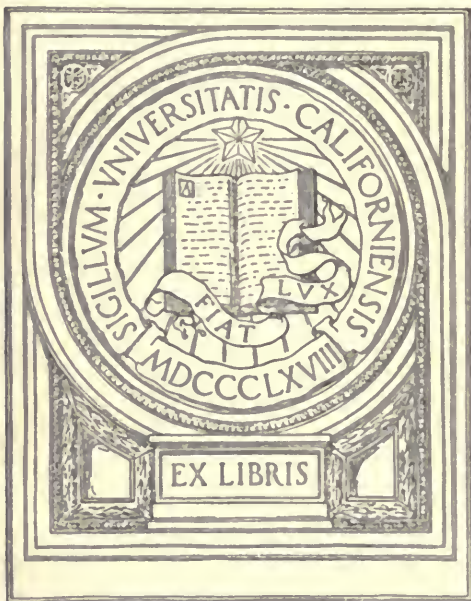


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BURGLARS IN PARADISE

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS



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Gift of Mrs C.C. Anderson

BURGLARS IN PARADISE.



I.

THE RUMOR.

IF it had not been for that horse —

But this requires explanation.

Some time ago, I had the pleasure of recording the experience of a single and singular lady, who built a house and lived in it. To any reader by chance acquainted with those records no introductory words will now be needed. To such as are unfamiliar with the annals of "The Old Maid's Paradise" it may be necessary to say that they concerned the fortunes of a family of two, — mistress and maid. I mistake; it was a family of three, — mistress, maid, and dog. They were known to the public respectively as Corona,

Puella Virginia (short, Puelvir), and Matthew Launcelot.

Corona's house was a matched-board cottage, situated, in summer, in the town of Fairharbor, on the sea-coast. As Corona spent the winters with her brother's family, she carried away the impression that her house was not situated anywhere from October to June. The poor, desolate, shuttered thing, shivering down there on the cliffs in the winter nor'westers, seemed to her to be blotted off the map by the first snow-storm, along with the wild roses and the golden-rod and the dandelion ghosts, and the sense of having one's own way, and paying the grocer for the privilege. Corona did not like to think about her house when she was out of it; it seemed like the corpse of a house, like an unburied friend: it made her sentimental. Her house was the only thing that she was known to be sentimental about.

She hurried back to it for that second season whose history it will be the effort of these columns to portray, with a bounding heart.

She had passed the bounding years. Life had begun to take steady paces. She had some time since ceased to expect things, and when they came they met her like friends in a crowd: a quick hand on the arm, a kindling eye, a sensitive cry, — “Why, *you!*” — and thus she had her surprise for her pains, the twofold pleasure of not hoping, the ardent comfort that comes from asking nothing of life and finding something when you don’t look for it. Corona was a person of “ways.” This was one of her ways; and she found it a very good one.

So, when she felt that old, patiently put-by pull at the arterial circulation, which comes of deeply wishing for a thing that is really going to happen, Corona experienced some curiosity over the psychological phenomenon.

“I did not expect to care so much,” she said to Puelvir, as they jounced democratically over the Fairharbor streets in the yellow omnibus. Fairharbor economizes her streets as a public gymnasium. The great ledges, worn by the great fish teams, and innocent of

Mr. McAdam's ministrative palliations, exercise the passengers obviously. Matthew Launcelot, in particular, being of so much less weight than either of his natural protectors, performed the flying trapeze and double bar from one end of the narrow, dingy red velvet cushions to the other, at irregular intervals, with an air of wounded dignity which lent pathos to the occasion.

"Here, I'll hold ye, if I've got to," said Puelvir.

"Did you speak to me?" asked Corona, dreamily.

Puelvir had not noticed the psychological problem. Whether it were above her or beneath her, who could say? Mistress and maid were fond of each other; and Corona was used to these little lapses in the line of human sympathy which come of solitary living with some one who is "different." She had a high regard for Puelvir, and watched her affectionately as she gathered Matthew Launcelot into her generous bosom.

"There, there!" said Puelvir. "Do set awhile, if there's any set in you!"

“He never kisses you,” observed Corona. “And he’s so fond of you, too! I wonder at it.”

“*Kisses me!*” cried Puelvir. “*Kisses me!* Why, I’d as lief be kissed by live men-folks (for aught I know) as by dogs. I knew a girl once set in a man’s lap while they was keepin’ company. I says to her, ‘I don’t see what you want to do it FOR. I should as soon think of goin’ an’ settin’ on the mantel-piece!’ I’ve trained him, you better believe,” added Puelvir. “I used to snap his nose every time he tried it. If that don’t work, I sprinkle him with a little vinegar. It’s excellent. They soon get over it.”

“Who get over it?” asked Corona, still in her dream. Pronouns were never Puelvir’s strong point. It took a while to get used to them.

“How natural it dooz look down here!” observed Puelvir, as the omnibus bobbed and cannonaded through the crooked streets, past the dreary wharves, by the pungent fish-flakes, where the salt cod dried in the sun

and swallowed the dust ; down past widening glints of cleanness, blueness, coolness, and so, at last, to the bright burst of the sea. " I alwez kinder learn to like a place by the signs ; don't you, Miss Corona ? I know 'em by heart down here. There's the Labrador Bakery ! See ? With that *beautiful* view he painted on his cart. Don't you remember ? She was an Injun woman settin' on a nice-berg ; and he asked a cent apiece more for his muffins because he had to pay that artist sech a price. He told me so. There's one sign I feel different about from any in Fairharbor. It's '*T. H. Trader. Boxes and Shooks.*' I could n't tell why, but it gives me such a feeling. I never feel to home till I see it. It's comin' this minute. See it ? Driving on that there cross-street ? '*T. H. Trader. Boxes and Shooks.*' What are shooks, Miss Corona ? You've lived here longer'n I have."

Corona shook her head. She had spent six summers in Fairharbor. Six hundred times had she perused the legend : "*T. H.*

Trader. Boxes and Shooks." Never had she organized an inquiry as to the nature or purpose of a shook.

"A modern writer has said women have no intellectual initiative, Puelvir."

"Ma'am?" said Puelvir.

As the two women approached their home with this stimulating conversational prelude, Corona's heart sank a little.

"Shall I lower to her level day by day?" she thought. But she was comforted by some fellow-passengers in the omnibus. They were married people; they, too, were coming to their summer home by the inspired and inspiring sea; they, too, had talked in the omnibus, and this was the literal transcript of their wedded conversation:—

(*She.*) "Harry, where's my shawl-strap? You've left it behind!"

(*He.*) "It is under your feet, my dear. You said you wanted a footstool, the omnibus jolted so."

"I'll never ride in this omnibus again, if I live to get out of it! Now, Harry, where is my sun-umbrella?"

“Safely strapped up with my cane, Jenny.”

“Well, anyway, you’ve broken the pulsatilla bottle. I knew you would when you sat down so hard. I see it leaking out of your coat pocket now. I shall *never* get to sleep without it, and I shall *have* to send you back to town to get some more.”

(*He*, grimly, under his mustache.) “I don’t doubt you will !”

“What did you say, sir ?”

(*He*, promptly.) “I did n’t say anything.”

“I’m *sure* you did. You can’t deny it.”

“I do deny it. We have n’t either of us said anything since we started. Do keep still. That lady overhears.”

“I don’t care *who* hears. I insist upon knowing. Why, here’s the pulsatilla in my hand-bag, after all !”

Silence succeeded.

(*She*, with an air of originality.) “How this omnibus does rattle !”

(*He*, absently.) “Oh ! — very.”

“Harry ! What a hot day it is !”

(*He*, patiently.) “Quite hot.”

(*She.*) "I'm tired to death!"

(*He.*) "You have your pulsatilla."

"Well, *I* sha'n't sit down on it and break it, at any rate!" This with the air of one who has made a strong moral point.

"Here we be," said Puella Virginia at last. "He's left my hogshead bottom up'ards. Whatever I'm to do for water come o' Monday, and the clothes-post's blowed down, and the spare-room blind's off. The roof needs paintin'. I'll bet it leaks. The coal-bin ain't built, and all Mis' Rowin's chickens are settin' on your front piazza. But, thanks to mercy, she's washed them windows! and, as for me, *I've got home.*"

The maid gave a happy, boisterous sigh that went to the mistress's heart. It touched her to have the dependent forget her dependence. And that all the home she had to offer, to the only creature to whom she might offer it, should be dear to that other solitary woman too, — this was a pleasure. Matched board walls and a cook were all Corona had. But it is the eternal *heimlichkeit* that draws us on.

"I'm glad to have you happy, Puelvir dear," the mistress said. She had never called Puelvir Dear before. If she was served the less loyally, or with the less respect for it thereafter, these records know it not.

She flung down her baggage, anyhow, with the old assured confidence in Puelvir's maternal capacity for "picking up," and wandered through the house with a consciousness of girlish abandonment to the sensations of the moment. To speak of wandering through a house twenty feet cube in proportions may be subject to criticism in matter of style; but there are spaces and vistas in one's own home not measurable by the carpenter's scale. How dear it was! The silence and chill frozen there in layers of solitude all the patient winter melted at the first footfall of love. It was a warm day of early June; and the sun lay at full-tide through the afternoon windows of the gray parlor. All the familiar trifles seemed to bask in the yellow flood consciously. They glanced at her with dumb eyes, that tried to say, "We have missed you." In a

world like this, is it not something to be missed even by a picture? Corona's heart went out to the photographs and the carmine ribbons and the frieze of cardinal flowers on the wall; and she caressed the silver-gray curtains with a tender shake.

Through the open door the Harbor looked in radiantly. A few small sails leaned southwesterly, bent on small errands in the summer afternoon. The opposite shore had the gentle colors of the late seashore spring; even the hoary gray of the reefs seemed younger than its wont, and the greens were all sensitive still. The water and the sky were bold and happy blue. Down on the beach the traces of the winter storms, cut in gorges, made black rifts on the gray crescent; and the weeds were massed in rich bronze heaps at the hither end of the curve. The fishermen's salt-barrels and lobster-traps, piled against the stone wall, gave the definite linear foreground that artists love. The rolling downs, with their grazing cattle, made the eastward horizon gracious to the eye. These, and the beach, the cliffs, the

meadow, and the road among the willows, were innocent yet of "summer people." Corona had it all to herself. The double throb of the seen and the unseen breakers from the Harbor and the outer shores beat powerfully.

"How dear you are!" she said.

Her neighbors, — Heaven bless the neighbors, — it seemed, had missed her, too. The fires were lighted and laid. The tea-table was set. Somebody had sent hot rolls. Somebody else asked leave to bring a pie. Flowers were all over the house. Tiny garden-patches, walled about with shells after the Fairharbor fashion, had been built by unknown hands, and planted with the affectionate but unfortunate seeds that always perished during infancy in any garden of Corona's. Some one had filled an old dory with nasturtiums; she lay stranded upon the grass in the sheltered corner by the hogshead, looking as much like a lettuce-garden and as little like a boat as was practicable. Zero, in the overflow of his welcome, had brought a pail of water. Zero, it will be remembered, or

should be said, was the boy who went to the post-office ; and a pail of fresh water is the final luxury of civilization in Fairharbor. Corona shut herself alone into the little gray parlor, and collected her over-sensitive thought for those first few minutes. Only a matched board cottage, and Puelvir, and the ocean, and the neighbors, and Matthew Launcelot — and yet, how happy, how happy a thing is a human home ! Her eyes filled. What, then, would it be, to be people who have more than that ? What must it be like, to come home to that other kind of blessedness, the real homelikeness ? —

A cold nose and a pink tongue profusely interrupted this dangerous and uncharacteristic sortie of the imagination. Matthew Launcelot, alert to what he perceived to be the unusual, crept up into her arms, and made himself as agreeable as Nature had permitted him to be. Matthew Launcelot knew that he had effective eyes. He looked at her sentimentally and sadly, as who would say, “ But you have *me*.”

“ Bless you, yes ! ” said Corona, contritely. She caressed the dog, as if she would apologize to him. Nobody understood her better than Matthew Launcelot. If the wing of a flying vision had brushed her for that instant ; if the thing that had been and the thing that was not to be had met and cried out against each other upon her threshold, and in her strong despite, who but Matthew Launcelot need know ?

“ Somethin’ ’s happened,” said Puelvir, appearing at the door suddenly.

“ Very well, Puelvir. What, for instance ? ”

“ Mis’ Rowin’s been in. She told me to prepare you. I said I would. She thought she would n’t ask for you to-night, you’d be so upset by it. I told her it was very thoughtful in her.”

“ If her thoughtfulness extended — What is it that you have to prepare me for, Puelvir ? ”

“ Burglars,” said Puelvir, with grim triumph.

“ Ah ? ” listlessly from her mistress.

“They ’re all round the neighborhood. They ’ve stole Mis’ Rowin’s best nigh’gownd, and Mr. Jacobses old harness, and Tommy Thurston’s Bantam rooster. They ’re very dangerous men. There ’s five of ’em.”

“They must be dangerous men, — such deadly depredations. Is this all you had to prepare me for, Puelvir?”

“Well, no ’m. It hain’t. They’ve ben here. They’ve broke in.”

“Broken in! To my house! Burglars! Impossible, Puelvir. The shutters” —

“Well, yes ’m. Thanks to mercy, they *did n’t* get so very far. They found they was locked out by that there bronze bolt of your’n. They got in the little wood-shed window by the pantry. He seems to have been a large feller, and, nigh ’s we can make out, he stuck. Anyways he did n’t get no farther; but she told me to break it to you gently, for she was afraid it would be a shock to you. He took all he could lay hands on, and clared.”

“I thought you said there were five of them.”

“ I never said there was five squoze in that there two-foot window,” replied Puelvir loftily. “ But it’s an awful thing to think of, come to think on ’t. And they took ” —

“ What did they steal, Puelvir ? What is the amount of my loss ? Tell me the worst at once ! ”

“ Well, I did n’t say ’s they took so *much*,” answered Puelvir, in a disappointed tone. “ But they’re very dangerous men. And they’ve took the hatchet.”

“ The hatchet ? ”

“ Yes, the hatchet — howsomever they ever found it. When you and me wanted it, it was always at the bottom of the wood-pile, where he’d piled his wood onto it. *I* never found the hatchet in *this* house.”

“ Is that the extent of my losses, Puelvir ? ”

“ Well, pretty much. They’ve got the *hatchet*. And the carving-knife, — the one Zero used on the kindlin’. I’d like to see ’em cut that Bantam rooster with it ! And they took the close-pins, and the gimlet, and

a paper of tacks, and the *hatchet*. That's about all, nigh's Mis' Rowin can tell. She feels very bad about it. She said the neighbors would a set up nights to watch your house. She hoped you'd bear up under the shock. She wanted to know if we didn't want Zero to come over here and sleep; but I told her I guessed you'n me had tried that for one while."

"I think we must get along without Zero," said Corona. "But it is an unpleasant thought, — five of them getting in such very little windows in a person's house. I will think the matter over, Puelvir, and talk with you presently."

So Corona went out on the piazza to think the burglars over. Mrs. Rowin's hens were sitting there comfortably. They all arose and greeted her in a very hospitable manner, and walked away one by one, with an air of consideration for her feelings which made it impossible to "shoo" them.

As to that horse — but this requires time.

II.

THE SCARE.

"PUELVIR," said her mistress, that evening, when the two women prepared to face the first night alone, in a neighborhood known to be haunted by house-breakers, — "Puelvir, is Zero as deaf as he used to be?"

"Deefer," said Puelvir, laconically.

"Then I really don't think he would help us any; do you? We must make up our minds to protect ourselves. I think we can; don't you, Puelvir?"

"I've nailed the ironin'-board and the step-ladder and the big soap-stone and two flat-irons agen the shed window. I'd like to see 'em get in *there*."

"That's an excellent plan, Puelvir. I've been thinking it over. My idea was that we must really lock up. I've never paid

much attention to the subject. We will make a point of it. I think we 'd better begin early."

"I bet I know what they took the hatchet for, Miss Corona. I 've been thinkin' about it."

"And what was it for, Puelvir?"

"To carve Tommy's rooster with; that 's what they wanted of it. Depend on 't, they took your carvin'-knife first; 'n when they found what they 'd got in that knife — let alon' the rooster — they come back for the hatchet."

"Yes," replied Corona, pensively. "Mr. Tom and Mr. Sinuous used to say it was a little dull."

Corona referred to the only gentlemen guests whom the Old Maid's Paradise had yet known. Tom was her brother, and Mr. Sinuous may be recalled as the young man from Mt. Desert, who had played the Serpent in this feminine Eden, and removed a preferred friend from Corona's hearth-stone.

"We will lock up," repeated Corona. "We

will lock up very much. I think, with my pistol " —

Puelvir interrupted by an audible and significant, but smothered, titter. Corona regarded her inquiringly, to see if this expressed any disrespect toward the pistol. But Puelvir vouchsafed no explanation.

" And then, with Matthew Launcelot " —

" Matthew Launcelot ! " cried Puelvir.

" Certainly," replied the mistress, with some dignity. " He was given to me for a watchdog, Puelvir. I have no doubt that if Matthew Launcelot had been here, we should have our hatchet now, and that paper of tacks, too."

" Mebbe we should," said Puelvir, discreetly and obscurely. " Will ye leave me to lock up behind, and you lock up before ? I 'd like to see 'em," added Puelvir. " I 'd jest like to see 'em git into this house, and me in it ! "

Judging from Puelvir's kindling countenance, this remark might be taken as literally true.

The two women made solemn business of it, barricading the lonely house that night. At moments Corona thought of Tom, and of Susy and the baby sleeping in his big protection. But she patted Matthew Launcelot, and cleaned her pistol, and drew her bolts, and said her prayers, and kept a stout heart, and trusted in Puelvir and Providence, — much in the order of their going through this sentence.

Their preparations for the night were fearfully and wonderfully made. The defenses of the Old Maid's Paradise being of the most primitive nature, feminine ingenuity was put to the tests of despair. When Corona had come to the end of such locks and bolts as the house possessed, she drew upon her invention with a *naïveté* which would have been refreshing to the intellect of the burglar; but it is one of the few advantages left us by our advanced civilization that the gentlemen of the nipper and jimmy are not usually witnesses of the innocent devices for their amusement offered by the bosom of the fam-

ily in hours of panic ; the truth being that the hours of panic and the hours of peril in this, as in so many another case, fail to coincide.

Corona's *chef d'œuvre* consisted in countersearps of chairs as disposed in front of windows. She was confident that no house-breaker could pass the pyramids and Pisan Towers and Cleopatra's Needles and Bunker Hill Monuments which she constructed from this useful article of domestic furniture. Her confidence only came to an end with her chairs. Four to a set — bought "in the white" — brought the supply in Paradise to a visible mathematical end in the course of the evening. She depended on sofa-pillows until she remembered that they were not a noisy material for barricade purposes where the main value must consist in capacity for waking you up. She had what Mr. James would call "a phase" of faith in screws. But Corona had never in her life been able to make a hole for the screw, or to get the screw into the hole after she had made it.

In this case a native disability was emphasized by the absence of the gimlet, which had shared the fate of the hatchet and the paper of tacks. When she had labored nobly, but sadly, with the corkscrew for half an hour or so, Puelvir came to her relief.

“Land, Miss Corona ! A screw won’t screw without a gimlet any more ’n you can bury a coffin without a grave.”

“A screw won’t screw for a woman, I ’m afraid,” said her mistress, rather plaintively. “What have you done to your part of the house, Puelvir ? ”

“Well,” said Puelvir, setting her arms akimbo, and breathing very hard, “I ’ve used up all the nails in the house. It ’ll take me an hour to dror ’em out come mornin’. I built a sort of meetin’-house agen that there kitchen winder where the bolt ’s broke. I built it outen coal-hods and tongs and kitchen tables, let alon’ a few stove covers and the biler. Then I run the close-line all acrost the dinin’-room in a sort of slip-noose. They can’t get nowhere-acrost that dinin’-room with-

out bein' tripped and slip-noosed, would n't I like to see 'em ! ”

“ Excellent, Puelvir ! ” said Corona, in tones of faint admiration. “ But how am *I* to get across the dining-room ? ”

“ Oh ! *you* 'll have to go to bed up the outside stairs, through my room,” said Puelvir, serenely. “ I 'll light the lantern and take you right along.”

“ And those five burglars watching us from the street, exposed to full view by the light of that lantern ? Never, Puelvir ! We will go to bed in the dark. What else have you done ? ”

“ Well,” said Puelvir, gleefully, “ I 've kep' a kitchen fire. That 's what I 've done ! ”

“ A kitchen fire ! This hot night ! Why, what in the world ” —

“ Hot water,” said Puelvir, fiercely. “ And pokers. Red-hot pokers. And pailsful throw'd on 'em to scalt 'em. I 've run that piece o' hose you had to fetch water from the spring that would n't fetch, you know — up from the kittles into my room. I whit-

tled a hole in the floor to get it through, with the bread-knife, and Mis' Rowin's old axe. I borried it of her. I told her I wanted to cut some of them biscuit your brother's cook made for you to bring home in the lunch-box. I had to tell her something. I was n't going to give her the particulars. I tell you what, Miss Corona, come to get past them coal-hods, and the close-line, and all them nails, and the biler, and them soap-stones, and that there scaldin' water — and your screws," added Puelvir, as a polite after-thought, "I'll resk their burglin' much in this house to-night."

Corona's family passed, as may be inferred, a restless night. Mistress and maid stole up the outside stairs to bed, in the dark, guiltily.

"Some kind neighbor will take us for our own burglars, and shoot," whispered Corona, with chattering teeth.

"I dessay they mought," replied Puelvir, cheerfully. Puelvir was in high spirits. The duty of barricading Paradise had greatly excited her. It was impossible not to suspect

that Puelvir would be disappointed if nobody burgled ¹ that house.

When they had got safely past the slip-noose and the boiling water and the poker, and engineered their way by the fortresses of chairs without tilting them down, — for they hung poised with a delicacy which will hardly be credited to so stolid an article, unless one is familiar with this species of architecture, — when they were actually in their rooms, with the doors locked, and were well-nigh, indeed, in bed, a pathetic wail, followed by an imperious outcry, startled them from below. They had forgotten Matthew Launcelot.

With masculine indifference to feminine agitations, Matthew Launcelot, the only undisturbed member of the family, had slept off the exhaustion of travel in some invisible haunt down-stairs, and had waked under the apparent impression that he himself was being burgled in an acute form.

¹ I use this word without apology for a term which the present state of American civilization has surely rendered a necessity of the language.

“I’d rether hev burglars than that dog,” said Puelvir, scornfully. “He’s more trouble in the long run, and less use. Whar’ll he sleep now?”

“I would take him in my room; but it does n’t seem quite fair to defend myself so, at your expense,” said her mistress, kindly. “You can keep him, if you want to.”

“I would n’t take the critter away from you,” said the maid, politely. “It would n’t become me.”

It was decided that Matthew Launcelot should sleep on the landing at the head of the stairs, between the bedrooms.

“That divides the protection,” observed Corona.

“And halves the affliction,” muttered Puelvir, as she crept down again (in her night-dress and crimping-pins, with a gossamer waterproof too short for her), crawled past the hot water and the poker and the clothes-line and Bunker Hill monument and the boiler and the hose, and returned with the dog, whom she had found reposing, with an in-

jured air, upon the middle of the lace pillow-sham on the guest-room bed.

As I say, it was a very restless night. Every nocturnal sound took on awful proportions to Corona's straining ear. She could not sleep. She was oppressed with her sense of responsibility as the head of a family, if harm came to the innocent creatures entrusted to her care. "What if this were doubled, trebled, sextupled, by, for instance, a husband and five children?" she thought. It did not occur to her at the moment, — so powerful a compress is the habit of solitary life upon the imagination, — it really did not occur to her that a husband would halve, much less remove, the risk, but only how much he would add to the care.

It was a still night without, that is to say, there was no wind; and Corona tried to yield herself to the peace that comes in the power of the sea to those who understand and love it. She listened to the incoming of the faithful, friendly tide upon the beach and lava-gorge. She watched the shimmer of the

stars and head-lights in the Harbor ; each star made an arrow, and each head-light a shaft of fire in the waves ; where the anchored boats swung trustfully for their night's rest, there seemed a little tunnel of flame cut into the deep, as into a mine of light that lay ablaze below the blackness. Now and then a belated schooner stirred in slowly through the calm, lifting her sailing signals of scarlet and of green ; these pulsated as they moved against the purple sky. One ocean steamer, put in for some unknown errand, reared her huge outline in the channel, with high and brilliant lights. The shore fishermen were all well at home, and except for the sharp rattle of some furling sails, or the clank of a down-going chain as some unseen boat swung to her moorings, the Harbor was quite still.

Not so the Old Maid's Paradise. Every clapboard squeaked. Every shingle started. Each blind stirred stealthily. The very hogs-head groaned. Mysterious creaks ran along the outer stairs. Inexplicable moans started from the hammock on the piazza. Heart-

throbs kept time to every real and unreal interruption of the night's repose. Puelvir (and her crimping-pins) sat bolt upright in bed between dreams of having her throat cut by the man who stole the paper of tacks, and of being shot by Miss Corona. Matthew Launcelot, sensitive to the family atmosphere, or to Puelvir's criticism, slept fitfully, and musically divided the watches of the night according to a taste and a conscience of his own. When he did not bark he snored, and when he did not snore he barked. Thus the night passed.

"Puelvir," called her mistress once, through the thin walls, "are you asleep?"

"Hain't slept a wink," declared Puelvir, starting from her last dream. "Who could?"

"You did n't hear — anything, did you? You don't think we'd better go down, do you — and see?"

"It's them flat-irons," called Puelvir. "Or the biler. Mebbe it's your screws. And how to mercy are we ever goin' down them outside stairs in our nigh'gownds?"

“That’s true, Puelvir. I had n’t thought of it. You are quite right. How glad I am we had Matthew Launcelot sleep upstairs ! ”

“ *Be* you ! ” replied Puelvir, with deep significance. As the night wore on its way, Corona sank into the sleep which health is sure to snatch from weariness or even from anxiety. She was resting from her labors as the defender of her family, in a harrowing dream that she had married a minister in Montana, on a seven-hundred-dollar salary, when she was roused by a noise. This time it was a real noise. It was a terrible noise. It thumped and thundered, it shrieked and shattered through the silent, helpless house. Five burglars ? Fifteen burglars could not make its like. The two women sprang, by one awful instinct, and faced each other, shivering, on the landing. Corona had lighted her candle, and, true to her military instincts, grasped her revolver — by the muzzle. Puelvir appeared with her hose (the well-hose, I mean) gripped in a death-like

clutch, and immediately showered Corona from head to foot with the water from the kettle below, which, fortunately — the fire being low — was no longer “scald,” but of the temperature of melted ice-cream an hour after dinner.

The noise meanwhile continued, and accelerated. It was a noise that defied description. It seemed to come from the dining-room.

“I am going to descend,” said the Head of the Family in a hollow voice. “It is my duty. You need not come. Stay and save yourself, Puelvir. I shall go.”

“If you think you’re a-goin’ to be murdered one mortal step without *me*,” quavered Puelvir, “you may suit yourself to another hired girl.”

She pushed by her mistress, and, without another word, preceded her. Corona followed in a dripping condition. Pallid and panting, they crept down-stairs. Corona held her pistol pointed directly at Puelvir’s crazy-bone. Puelvir carried the hose, which was

doggedly sputtering cold water all over the house, with a general air of meaning to hit somebody, it did n't much matter whom. Since Corona was as wet as she could be already, she regarded the hose with indifference.

The noise continued *crescendo*, and, guided by its direful clew, these two defenders of their altars and their fires courageously made and stood their ground to see —

Matthew Launcelot. Matthew Launcelot and the clothes-line struggling together in the dining-room. Straight into the slip-noose — and nowhere else — that unhappy dog had walked. There, hanging, strangling, yelling, as nobody but Matthew Launcelot could yell, though one took lessons at forty dollars a quarter, the protector of his family was rescued from the burglar's fate not a moment too soon for the preservation of his valuable and soothing life.

The clothes-line was not popular, after this, as a means of domestic defense. The slip-noose was voted off the list. Matthew

Launcelot now slept in the kitchen. This required the abrogation of the window barricade, because he insisted on sleeping in the boiler, and it (and he) tumbled down on the stove, about midnight, every night. On ironing days, when the stove was hot, this had its disadvantages. Gradually the soap-stones and the flat-irons seemed to become of less importance. The nails took too long to draw out again. The chairs in the parlor got scratched, and Cleopatra's Needle fell to the earth at three o'clock A. M. one night, producing more of a shock to the nervous system than any gentlemanly Bostonian burglar could possibly cause. Corona's screws had never got more than half-way. Thus the burglar alarm of Paradise became, like those of more ambitious homes, "more expensive than the burglars," and, as fear gave way before the absence of adventure, a daring disregard of consequences, united to the native indolence of the hour preceding bed-time, led the two women back to less exciting, if less ingenious, methods of locking their house. As

no more hatchets or roosters were stolen, their terrors slept. Corona ceased to reflect upon the anxieties of protecting an imaginary husband. Life in the matched-board cottage reacted to more than its usual level of serenity.

It was in the apathy following the intensity of that first experience, perhaps, that Corona's thoughts took an idle and luxurious turn, which she one day communicated to the partner of her joys and sorrows, in these startling words : —

“ Puelvir, I'm going to buy a horse.”

III.

GOOD FAMILY HORSES.

CORONA'S announcement of her intention to purchase a horse plunged her family and immediate circle of friends into one of those panics of good advice which are sure to follow (if anything follows) the unexpected upon the part of a solitary woman. Corona reflected that this was so much better than for nobody to care enough to advise her that she bore it with grateful good-humor. Her sister-in-law wrote by return mail that it was very extravagant, and that she would need the money for a seal-skin cloak ; but finance and a comprehension of Corona's needs were not Susy's strong points. Tom telegraphed : " You 'll get cheated." Some old friends known as Elf and Mary, who had shared Corona's first summer in Paradise, remon-

strated in letters of thirteen and seventeen pages respectively. Elf objected on the ground that Matthew Launcelot was already as much of a zoölogical responsibility as one woman could sanely support. Mary said that Mr. Sinuous said that it was better to hire from the livery, on account of the blacksmith's bills ; but then Mary was still a bride.

General and Mrs. Wolchester drove over from Gride's farm to advise Corona to substitute a tricycle. Some Boston acquaintances said *their* horses always had the heaves. Old Father Morrison, the lobster man, asked where she was goin' to keep the critter, and remarked that his own legs was good enough for him. Mrs. Rowin claimed that horses were dangerous animals to have around. Zero cautiously observed that he did n't know a boy in Fair-harbor would tackle up for less than five dollars and seventy-five cents a week. Puelvir said nothing at all — the severest form of personal discouragement which Puelvir was ever known to throw upon her mistress's hopes or purposes.

To all of this kindly interest Corona responded with a cheerful deference to the views advanced in each respective case, and proceeded to take steps for the furtherance of her own ; a course of conduct which made all her advisers happy, and herself besides, — and that was a good deal to achieve.

To her brother she wrote as follows : —

“DEAR TOM, — Thank you for your offer to come down and buy my horse. You know I should be glad to have you, and you know you won’t come. Any ‘horse-sense’ forwarded to me by telegraph or telephone, in the intervals of your duties, will be gratefully receipted, and respected. Until you do get her, I think I shall look about a little for myself.

“It is true that I have never before been the purchaser of a family horse. I admit it. But when I think of the years I have driven Susy down town, and waited for her to do her shopping in a sleet-storm ; when I remember the occasions upon which I have (in your unavoidable absence) harnessed to go for the doctor

for the baby, — usually at night, — and to be professionally told that nothing ailed her; when I reflect upon the August afternoons, with the thermometer at 95°, that have seen me jerking and cl'k'king the family carryall along to give the baby an airing, — and especially upon the occasion when the door gave way, and she tumbled out backward and turned a somersault between the wheels, and landed sitting down beneath the carriage; when I recall the training I had in catching Old Ben, raw from the pasture, to go for the mail, because Patrick had a sick headache, the day after a wake, and Susy was afraid he would break down, — when I think these things over calmly, I am fain to ask, however modestly, if my horse education will not go for something in the awful risk which I feel I am about to take upon myself.

“Cheated? I *expect* to get cheated. Why should I escape the universal human fate? But worse things may happen to a woman than to be cheated; and I want a horse, be he honest or a rascal, and am,

“Yours,

CORO.”

Scarcely twenty-four hours had elapsed since Corona's intention to add a horse to her domestic circle had been mentioned aloud, before she found herself in the heart of a new world. It might be succinctly called the Horse World. The delights of the fireside, the enticements of the June sky, the fascination of the ocean, the delicate shift and play of summer life, receded from her consciousness like plates in a magic lantern. Her brain-cells became stenciled with the language and literature of the turf. Anxious to proceed upon her rash venture with some degree of intelligence, she had made herself the possessor of a book called "The Horse and his Habits." When anybody called — as somebody did at the rate of six or seven a day — with a horse to sell, she consulted this useful volume. She received the impression that a horse was the most delicate creature, and subject to the richest stock of bodily infirmities of any specimen of organized life known to our present civilization. An infant or a woman was nothing to it. Beyond this one idea, which rapidly assumed the dan-

gerous proportions of the "fixed," in Corona's mental life at this period, it cannot be said that she brought away much available knowledge from "The Horse and his Habits." She perused the book sturdily. Tom did not come. Of course Tom did not come, — he was in Idaho ; it was something about bear-skins, — so she clung to this intelligent volume bravely, as the sole defense between herself and that delicate sense of honor well known to belong to the jockey considered as a class. Who has ever solved the riddle, What is there about horses which should be so injurious to the human conscience ? Why should a horse make a man a commercial rascal, rather than glue, or cracked wheat, or dry goods, or soap ?

One horse in particular pleased Corona very much. The owner had come every day with it, and stayed. He had stayed very much. He had fastened his horse to the clothes-post, beginning on Monday, when the lines were up, and outstayed all the other bids. Corona, with feminine respect for the pertinacious in pursuit, admired the perseverance of this man,

and hated to hurt his feelings by refusing to take his horse.

Her friend Mary had come over to stay a few days (Mr. Sinuous said she might. This was the more praiseworthy in Mr. Sinuous because he himself was not invited), in order to help Corona through this trying period. The two ladies drove together from morning to night, experimenting with the different applicants, in the lazy, delightful country fashion that makes horse-hunting as a high art a pleasure unknown to towns. Through murmuring lanes, where the bees fastidiously tasted the barberry blossoms, over the brilliant beaches, and deep into the scented woods, Mary and Corona rode and rode. They rode with old horses, young horses, sound horses, sick horses, horses that went, and horses that would n't go, and horses that went more than was expected of them ; horses that ran away with them and horses that sat down with them, horses that limped, horses that stumbled, horses that coughed, horses that took the bits between their teeth, and horses

that would n't go up-hill without a lump of sugar. There was one — but only one — who kicked the dasher down when he met the first summer boarder, in an imported shade hat, constructed in the form of an orthodox meeting-house, and ornamented with muslin sun-flowers.

For some reason sufficient to the reader of "The Horse and his Habits," none of these animals seemed suitable for the needs of her family, and she returned with a weakening heart to the horse tied at the clothes-post since Monday morning. His owner was quite sure that he would fill the bill.

"The bill?" asked Corona. "Fill what bill? We have n't come to the bill yet."

"Pardon, mum," said the man, reddening a little.

Corona looked at him vaguely. She was still deficient in "horse-talk." She explained that she wanted a good family horse.

She was assured that this was a perfect specimen of the kind of thing.

Sound?

Sound as sense! Had n't an out about him.

Corona did not know what an out was. She thought it might be some new kind of disease. So she consulted "The Horse and his Habits" before replying.

"It is n't in my book," she whispered to Mary. "It may be one of those new aggravations developed by the epizoötie. But as long as the horse has n't *got* it, I don't see that it matters. Do you?"

"Why — n-no. I should n't *think* it did," said Mary, conscientiously.

They went out again and reëxamined the horse. He was a very handsome horse.

Was he kind?

Kind as a tarrier pup.

Afraid of the ears?

Cars? He was n't afraid of the Last Trumpet.

How many miles an hour?

Ten, week-days, and twelve and a half if you wanted the doctor. Easy.

"But we never *do* want the doctor," objected Corona, thoughtfully.

Was he easy-bitted ?

You could drive him with a hair-pin and a piece of sewin'-silk.

His price ?

Two hundred and fifty dollars.

Lowest price ?

Lowest price ; that was fifty dollars less 'n an animal with his points would bring anywhere else. But seein' she was a lady — sort of, as you might say, unprotected, no men folks to deal with — he 'd let *her* have it for two hundred and fifty, cash down.

“ It is a good deal to get a horse that will never have the outs,” observed Corona *sotto voce* to her friend. “ And he is so handsome ! I think I will take him — on trial.”

“ I've got to go to Boston to buy a Canady colt,” objected the trader. “ You could n't close just as well now, could you ? It would be a great convenience to me.”

Corona was sorry to inconvenience him, but she thought it best to keep the horse for half a day or so before she bought him. She had no doubt she should decide to keep him.

She liked the animal very much. She thanked the trader for his perseverance, and ordered the horse brought round for a drive at two o'clock. His name? she asked, as an after-thought; they had found it a little difficult to distinguish among the horses. The horse-that-sat-down, for instance, was rather long; and The-long-legged-horse-with-the-gout (or whatever they called it) that-ran-over-a-wheel-barrow-and-a-baby took time. The name of this very handsome horse without an out was Pepper.

Corona and Mary took a trial trip with Pepper. He started off excellently. He was exceedingly handsome. The ladies enjoyed driving such a handsome horse. They went over by the celebrated Long Beach, where the waves came affectionately to the most solitary and silver sands of the fair coast-line. The full afternoon coloring was on the water: the horizon line quivered with sails; the sky blazed like a blue mirror of the gods into which no mortal face should gaze. The two friends were not used to driving in Fairhar-

bor, and they felt as if they had come to a new place. They were in the best of spirits, and enraptured with the handsome horse. He made good time. He was easy at the bit. He had no dangerous tricks.

“And he looks,” said Corona hopefully, “as if he had a strong constitution.”

“Perhaps,” ventured Mary, “he has had everything, and come safely out of it. Let us hope so.”

“I think I shall buy him to-morrow, and put him in Mr. Jacobs’s barn, and get Zero to take care of him,” proceeded Corona. “It will be a great comfort to have decided on a horse who could be driven with a skein of sewing-silk and who is not afraid of the Last Trumpet, and especially one who would go for the doctor in twelve miles a minute.”

“Was it twelve miles a *minute*?” asked Mary, looking a little puzzled. “And — why, there, Corona, look there! No. Look here. — What upon earth is the matter with this horse? How queerly he acts!”

“He does act a little queerly,” admitted Corona.

“He does n’t seem to feel right about the leg there.”

“It is true, he does n’t; he seems to jerk it a good deal,” faltered Corona. “I don’t know what it means, I’m sure.”

“Do you think he’s harnessed right?” queried Mary. They were in a very lonely place, two miles from a man.

“Oh, yes! I know it is n’t the harness. I can harness. I would n’t take a lady to drive if I could n’t. I declare! how this horse *does* act! I wonder if he has n’t got the outs, after all?”

“He looks like one of those wooden jumping-jacks you put in children’s Christmas stockings,” observed Mary, more courageously.

“He does seem uncomfortable,” assented Corona. “But I don’t see that we can do anything but drive back and ask somebody.”

“Let us ask the first man we meet,” suggested Mary. “He is likely to be unprejudiced.”

“Very well,” assented Corona again. “But if I had ‘The Horse and his Habits’ here — I left it at home.”

The first man they met was a letter-carrier. It is one of the salient points of Fairharbor that you meet letter-carriers in the wilderness almost anywhere, just as you meet lamp-posts in the forest; and that the government kindly supplies them (I mean the carriers) with little open buggies to ride in.

At the foot of the long sandy hills, in the beautiful width of marsh and thicket and pools of bright green water, with the sea at their backs and the city two miles away at their faces, the two ladies met the letter-carrier in his carriage, and asked him what ailed their horse.

“He seems to hitch his leg up and down in a singular manner,” said Mary, apologetically.

“I have n’t paid for him,” cried Corona, hastily. “I thought I’d like to ask some stranger what he supposed ailed him.”

The carrier leaned out luxuriously from

the open buggy, and gave one languid look at Pepper's right hind leg.

"Hain't bought him, ye say?" with a gentle smile.

"Oh, no; not at all. But I had thought I should until" —

"I would n't if I was you," observed the carrier, driving on.

Without offering any further information the officer of government departed, and left the ladies and Pepper to their reflection. Corona said she should drive straight to the omnibus man and ask what was the matter with that horse. She did so, as quickly as possible; Pepper meanwhile striking out obliquely and transversely at the sweet summer air in a very unpleasant and irregular manner.

"He? Oh! He's got the spring-halt," said the omnibus man. "I know *him*. He's had it for years."

"The string-halt?" said Corona to Mary as they walked home. "I don't seem to remember the string-halt. I don't believe it is in my book."

“You’ll remember it now,” said Mary.

As Corona did not purchase that handsome horse, she was fain to look about a little more. She received a letter that interested her from a person in a neighboring village, who said he had a horse for sale which he was sure would please her. It was just the horse for a lady to drive. He hoped she would give him a call. He would be honest with her, — he always meant to be honest with a lady, — and tell her there was one objection to the horse: he was n’t exactly handsome; but he had points enough to make up for that, especially as a lady’s horse. In particular, he was very kind. Corona’s faith in the commercial value of beauty having received a shock, she was inclined to look up the horse who owned to being not exactly handsome; so she and Mary drove to the neighboring village — known by the beautiful Indian name of Carriesquall — to see the homely horse.

He proved to be, indeed, no Adonis; but he looked, as his owner averred, kind. In fact, he did not look much *but* kind, if one

told the truth. He was big, burly, gray, and serious. He had a philosophical air, and regarded Corona with the manner of one who could teach her a few abstract truths, if he thought it worth his while.

"Well, sir," said Corona, "we have traveled fourteen miles to see your horse. Is this he?"

"This is he," was the proud reply. "There is n't a better horse in all Carriesquall, for a lady's horse, than that there horse. He's just as *kind*" —

"What's his name?" asked Corona.

"Wall, *we* call him the Old Army. But you ken call him most anything you choose. After you've bought him."

"Was he in the army?" cried Mary. "How interesting! Was he wounded?"

"He was left for dead," said Old Army's master, solemnly. "His master, which was a major-general, never expected to get him home alive."

"But he did?" asked Mary, breathlessly, quite forgetting herself.

“Yes, marm. He did. That there is the very horse. And he’s as *kind*” —

“He looks kind,” observed Corona, tenderly. “How old is he?”

Truth compels me to state that it had not, up to this moment, occurred to her that the military career of Old Army in the Civil War could have any disadvantageous connection with his age. To put it delicately, was it not one in which she herself shared? Had not she, too, lived out the War? And did it seem other than year before last since she bade Tom good-by in the dark, on the piazza, at their father’s house? Handsome boy! How brave he looked, with that quiver in the lip that kissed her! And was it more than last year that she caught him to her heart again? Safe, safe, safe, thank God — and fought it through! No. She, too, had “been through the War,” and to her, too, as to all others like her, it was a living, palpitating present, on which age could lay no hand. A quarter of a century since Tom’s regiment marched away? A quarter of a cen-

tury since she snatched the list of "*Killed, Wounded, Missing,*" in the blurring, shaking paper every day? A quarter of a century since —

"He's just as *kind*" — the master of Old Army was saying very distinctly. Corona started, and begged his pardon — and, Mary, did you speak? What is the price, sir, of this kind and patriotic horse? A price was named; but Corona did not listen, did not hear. She and Old Army regarded each other closely. She looked into the eyes of the ancient warrior. She stroked his cheek tenderly. She wanted him. But the veteran responded to her gaze with a deep and intelligent look. He knew better than that. If ever a horse tried to say to a purchaser, — "Don't do it! You're very complimentary, and I appreciate it, but don't you do it!" that horse then and there essayed to do that thing.

"How much did you say?" asked Corona, coming slowly to herself, and trying to look like "*The Horse and his Habits*" bound in

two volumes at Old Army's master, who replied that he had said one hundred and eighty dollars.

"That seems a large price for so old a horse."

"Oh! he was only ten come last March," said Old Army's master, confidently. "He ain't what you 'd call old yet."

"He is n't exactly young, you know," demurred Corona, politely.

"Wall, I did n't suppose you was after a colt,—for a lady's horse. There's this about a good, mature horse, you know. He's had the measles and all those juvenile diseases. You're sure he has n't got 'em to go through again."

Mary hastily said that she thought this was a great point.

"How many miles does he make?" asked Corona, pursuing her inquiries more rigorously, now, by force of reaction from that vision of a score of years ago. Smoke, blood, butchery, the arms thrown up in falling, the flag flung to the bright sky above it all,—

let it pass. Let come, as come it must, and pass. Through the red and awful mist how pathetically look out the eyes of these dumb things that we made soldiers of, who learned the deadly skill of war, acquired its valor, bore its tortures, earned its glory they knew not how, and died, they knew not why !

“How fast,” proceeded Corona, bringing herself violently back, — “how fast can Old Army go, on an average ?”

“Wall, he ain’t a *racer*,” reluctantly.

“I perceive that. But how much, for instance, will he make an hour? What kind of a roadster is he ?”

“Wall, he don’t go so very *fast*. But he’s an excellent lady’s hoss. He’s just as *kind*” —

“I don’t underrate his kindness. But what I want to know, before I purchase that horse, is, exactly how much time you can get out of him.”

“If you feed him well ?” hopefully.

“Oh, yes ! If you feed him very well.”

“And don’t over-use him ?”

“Never.”

“Give him twelve quarts a day and his hay?”

“Certainly. Fourteen, if he wishes it and can work for it.”

“Wall,” — slowly. “Wa-al,” faintly. “He’s an excellent *lady’s* hoss. And he’s as *kind* — But he ain’t so much on speed as some hosses is. Fact is, he won’t” —

“Well? He won’t” —

“Why, the fact is, he *won’t trot at all!*”

IV.

THE LADY OF SHALOTT.

“THERE’s ben a horse-man here to see you,” said Puelvir. “Three of him. I sent the fust one off myself.”

“Why, Puelvir !”

“Well, I did. He had a sort of shiny, skity, graham-flour colored horse he said he was sure you’d buy. So I asked the grocer when he come, and *he* said the critter had the glanders. He said he’d known him ever since him and the horse were babies.”

“Did n’t he say the glanders, perhaps, Puelvir ?”

“No ’m,” said Puelvir stoutly. “*This* horse had the glanders ; I’m sure of it. So I took it upon myself to tell him it was n’t your reception-day, and you could n’t see fashionable callers. So he went away. He swore at me, too.”

“Swore at you, Puelvir?”

“Yes. He said I was a darned old fool. I don’t know’s I blame him. I had n’t got my switch on, and I think I do look a little mature mornin’s. The next one, he come to the front door and sot down in the parlor, do my best. He said he’d wait for you, ’n there he sot. He had a span he wanted you to buy. I told him you could n’t keep a span, because you had n’t only me, and I could n’t take care of two; it would interfere with the cookin’. He asked eight hundred and twenty-five dollars for ’em. I asked him what he took you for.”

“Dear me, Puelvir! You do turn them off easily.”

“Well, this one took the life-out of me. He sot, an’ sot. I warn’t agoin’ to leave him alon’ in the parlor, so I sot too. He looked at the picters and the photograph albums ’n he said he’d heard you was quite well along in years; but he’d never had the pleasure of seein’ you to make your acquaintance. I told him you was only twenty-five, and had refused more offers than any lady I knew of.”

“Why, Puelvir!”

“I did. I knew the kind of feller I’d got hold of. There warn’t no other way to teach him manners. He kinder meeked down after that. So by and by I told him I’d got a pud-den’ to make, and that you’d gone to Carrie-squall to buy a horse you liked, so he’d have to excuse me. So I showed him the door, and he drove his span away, spilin’ for a fight.”

It was in the midst of these agitating and depressing days that there came a telegram from Tom. It was dated: —

“UNION PACIFIC RAILWAY,
Latitude and Longitude unknown,
June —, 18 —.”

and ran, —

“If there is a man in Fairharbor you can trust, trust him. Have known good horses got that way. Can’t get back till August.

“TOM.”

Corona filed the telegram for reference, and meanwhile pursued her search, with various and serious results. All the poetry of life was

now crushed under the mailed feet of horses. The glamour of the sea and shore fled before the whip of the jockey. She wondered how long it would take whatever comfort she did get out of her horse, when she got him at all, to compensate for the loss of spiritual tone which a month of horse-hunting had cost her ; and then it occurred to her, perhaps for the first time quite intelligently, to wonder how it was with people who *had* to occupy themselves with matters which interfered with the spiritual tone, and how fair it was to try them on the same sort of keyboard or tuning-fork by which one would set the moral music of different lives.

She pursued these very natural reflections with the zest of novelty, while she and Mary drove all about the wonderful Cape in the long summer days. For still they rode and rode. They rode with pretty horses and ugly horses, serious horses and frivolous horses, safe horses and dangerous horses. There was one that went to sleep in the harness while they were doing errands, and snored. There was

one which they decided to buy, and the bargain was all but irrevocably closed, when Old Father Morrison rowed the length of the Harbor against a head wind, and arrived in an exhausted condition just in time to say that he knew a man who knew another man who said his diseased wife's sister used to own that horse, and then he was spavined and blind in one eye. There was one very interesting animal that Mary took a fancy to, and he died of an attack of the heaves while they were driving in the woods, six miles from home. Mary thought he had the whooping-cough, and declared the trouble was that the horse was too young. There was another which deeply attracted Corona, but when her interest in him had reached an advanced stage, one pleasant morning he had the blind staggers, and ran away with them, and threw them both out into a blackberry thicket, and the owner sent in a bill for the buggy.

Matters were in this discouraging position when, one day, Puelvir said a very pleasant-complected gentleman had come to see about

a horse, and she had told him her mistress would be down directly. When Corona answered this summons, she was surprised to find an old Fairharbor acquaintance who had moved to a neighboring town, and whom she had not seen for some time. His name was Thumb, Mr. Thumb. He was a carpenter. She greeted him cordially. Had he not once been a neighbor? And Fairharbor neighbors all wore a kind of glamour to Corona. Each one seemed to belong to her, to compose her life in concentric layers, as the rings compose a tree.

“I didn’t know’s you’d recollect me,” said Mr. Thumb.

Corona assured him that she had never forgotten him.

“I heard tell you wanted a horse,” said Mr. Thumb.

Corona’s heart sank; but she admitted the fact.

“Hain’t been very lucky, have ye?”

Not very. But she hoped to succeed in time.

“Do you remember my little boy?” asked the old neighbor, abruptly.

“Oh! perfectly,” said Corona. “Which little boy? Bob, or Freddy? Or Benjamin Franklin, or” —

“Not any of *them*,” interrupted the father. “I mean my other little boy, my little dwarf boy.”

“Ah! Yes, indeed, I do.”

“The little deformed fellow, — hunch-back, they called him.”

“Of course I remember him. Tommy, was n’t he?”

“Yes, marm, Tom was his name. It was a very unfort’nate name. But, you see, me’n his mother did n’t know he was going to be like that when we named him, and, seeing he was christened so, his mother did n’t like to alter it; for she’s pious, being a perfessor. He *mind*ed his name, I think, some. It made him shy of the other children. He always liked to be round a house with women folks.”

“Yes, I remember,” said Corona, softly. “He was a dear little fellow. How is he now?”

“Do you remember how you used to have him over to see you when you was a summer boarder, before you ever built, or his mother ’n me moved out o’ town?”

“I had almost forgotten that. I only remember what a dear little gentle thing he was.”

“Wall, you did. You used to ask him over to sit in your hammock and play picture-books on your floor. He was very fond of you.”

“He said,” added Mr. Thumb, after a pause, “that he felt like other boys when he went to see that lady. He liked you. You were good to him. Don’t you remember, too, when he had the fever, settin’ up nights with him one spell? And taking of him to ride when he got better?”

“It was such a little thing to do,” said Corona, with her eyes full. “I was well. I was perfectly able. Anybody would.”

“Do you think so?” asked Mr. Thumb, slowly. “Well, I don’t know. But his mother and me remember it. You made him

a Jack-o'-lantern, too ; he called it a Jack-melantern ; he had such queer little ways. So I thought I'd come over to see you. I" —

Mr. Thumb hesitated, rose, sat down again ; the color came all over his plain, straightforward face.

"I don't know how to say the thing I've come for to say, now I've got here, exactly. It ain't a common sort of business."

"Is Tommy pretty well?" asked Corona, cheerfully, to help him on.

"I — guess so," said the father, looking hard into his hat. "I hope the little fellow's well these days. He died last March." . . .

"*Oh!*" cried Corona, in her quick, impulsive way. "Oh! you poor people! Oh! I never heard about it!"

But she did not say she was sorry. Who could be sorry for Tommy?

"Of course he's well," she whispered, "and straight, and — like the other boys. Dear little Tommy!"

She found it hard not to say, How glad I am! But a glance at the father's face re-

strained her. Great, sparse tears were falling into the carpenter's old felt hat. He brushed them away with the back of his hand.

(Do working-people do this because grief cannot wait for time to wash the fingers?) He brushed away the tears, and rose to go.

"He died very quick and easy, marm. Nobody knew what ailed him. But he's dead. His mother and me, we miss him more 'n you think we would. . . . And when I heerd you wanted a horse, and the way them traders was puttin' on you, I says to his mother, I'll sell her my mare, if she wants it. And I come over to say so. Would you like to see her? She's tied outside."

Corona remembered Tom's telegram, and she glanced at Mr. Thumb keenly.

"You are very good," she began, not knowing what to say.

"No," said Mr. Thumb, putting his hat on. "It's not that. Dare say I shall sell the mare anyways to somebody. I want the ready money. I shall have to ask you her vally. She'll fetch it, any time. If you'll

trust me, I won't take a cent beyond it. She's sound, and she's kind, and she's all I'll sell for. And she's a pretty fair roadster. Tommy was very fond of that mare."

"I don't sell her so much to make a trade," added Mr. Thumb, lifting his head, "as I do because I want to sell you a good horse. I says to his mother, 'She's been *kind* to me.' If you feel inclined to trust me, ma'am — You need n't, if you don't choose, you know; there's no obligation to it. But you've been *kind* to me, and I'd like to see you have a good horse!"

"I think," he said again, "that mebbe Tommy'd like it if he was round, you know. . . . He ain't," added the father, pitifully.

The lady and her old neighbor looked into each other's eyes for a moment, then Corona held out her hand.

"Let us go out and see the horse," she said, in a low voice. "If I like her, I shall take her *on trust*, Mr. Thumb."

Mr. Thumb's eyes, though they were still wet because of Tommy, twinkled pleasantly.

He thought of his ready money ; but it was without alarm. A new phrase had been added to the "horse talk" with which he was familiar ; he repeated it to himself with a decorous chuckle.

"She 'll take her *on trust*, will she ? Come, I like that now !" as he untied the mare from the clothes-post and brought her out into the road.

She was a pretty creature. Corona took in her points rapidly, with an eye which experience was training to the imperfect extent to which experience can do much for any of us. The mare was a good color, a chestnut ; she had a straight backbone and broad, solid hips, a clean-cut hoof, and eyes which indicated that she carried her heart in her brains. Her teeth said that she was about five years old. She carried her head daintily, had a fine and sensitive skin and an air of refinement, which tells as quickly in a horse as in a woman. She seemed to be in excellent health. Mary said she did not believe anything would ail that horse unless it should be nervous exhaustion.

Puelvir said :—

“If you’ve got to have another critter, that’s the critter!”

Matthew Launcelot came out and sniffed at the mare’s delicate ankles, critically. He had taken no interest in this horse business; it had filled him from the first with a melancholy which at times amounted to misanthropy; he turned his back after a moment’s inspection, with the air of a connoisseur whose opinion was undervalued; returned to the parlor sofa in disdain; then suddenly, seeming to be overcome by emotion more powerful than mere social prudence could manage, he darted out, planted himself directly in front of the horse, eyed her with savage intentness, and proceeded to lift up his voice in a series of prolonged and deafening howls, which reverberated from cliff to boulder with the force of anguish bursting from a soul misunderstood.

“The creetur’s jealous of the critter,” said Puelvir. “I would n’t have s’posed he had the brains. I think the more on him.”

Corona patted the dog, who received her caresses scornfully; but she looked into the eyes of the horse herself with a premonition that was half sadness.

“Shall I love you too?” she thought. For Corona had learned that increase of love is always increase of sympathy, and hence of pain; and that it was a toss-up in the dice of fate whether so much as the heart of a dumb thing is to be won without more cost than comfort. The ladylike horse returned her gaze with a certain solemnity. She seemed to say she understood. She seemed to say:

“On the whole, does n’t it pay?”

“I’ll try her on the beach,” said Corona, abruptly.

She took the mare out for an hour; she would let nobody go with her; she felt that they must understand each other by themselves. The pretty creature was an excellent roadster. She had her little fears and tremors and frolics, as any horse of spirit ought to have; but she yielded to the voice, and knew no tricks. Corona came home in love,

— hopelessly in love, and in chains to the little pony. She preserved her worldly presence of mind so far as to say that she would keep the horse in a neighbor's stable for twenty-four hours on trial, with Mr. Thumb's permission ; but, in fact, she meant to buy, and he knew she meant to. The deed was practically done.

“ What is her name, Mr. Thumb ? ” asked Corona, at the last moment, as Mr. Thumb prepared to catch the ferry to catch the train that would take him home without the mare.

“ We called her Betty,” said Mr. Thumb, apologetically.

“ I shall call her the Lady of Shalott,” said Corona, decisively.

“ The what ? ” asked Mr. Thumb, with his mouth open. “ The Lady-as-she-Ought ? Well. Don't know 's I ever heard a horse called by that name before. Don't know but it becomes her, too. *Tommy* called her Betty ; that 's all.”

“ I might call her the Lady Betty, half the time,” said Corona, quickly, “ just to remem-

ber Tommy by. She shall always be Betty to you, Mr. Thumb. When do you want your ready money, if I keep the horse? I shall have to go to Boston to get it. Will day after to-morrow do?"

Mr. Thumb's face lighted with the gleam that never was on sea or land in Fairharbor commerce. "Day after to-morrow!" in a community where the lavish, reckless habits of the sea invade the mortgaged shore to an extent that makes ready money a psychical phenomenon, — "day after to-morrow!"

"I would n't put ye out," said Mr. Thumb, hurrying, radiant, home to tell it all to Tommy's mother.

"Day after to-morrow!" said Mary. "I'm afraid it will be hot. But I'll go with you."

"Day after to-morrow!" echoed Puelvir. "I'll cook a cabbage and have a biled dinner, while I get the chance, and nobody nigh to hender."

It happened that the little family thus idly went about, each repeating the words with some trifling personal emphasis of her own,

“Day after to-morrow!” as each afterward remembered.

“When do you want me to begin to work for wages?” asked Zero, as he took away the Lady-as-she-Ought to get her dinner. “Day after to-morrow?”

“Here’s another of them Christian Union Telegrabs,” said Puelvir, coming into the parlor that evening with her switch on and her white apron. “The boy wants twenty-five cents, he says, for bringing of it down. I told him I’d give him five, for you supported the Company, and they’d ought to deliver their own goods, like other folks do.”

The telegram was from Tom. It was dated in Canada, and said : —

“Can have my old buggy and second harness. Welcome. Tell Patrick freight Fair-harbor. Home in three weeks. TOM.”

“Dear Tom!” said Corona. “The Holy Catholic Inquisition could not compel him to write me a letter. He says it is so much cheaper to telegraph. But he does remember.”

She went singing about The Old Maid's Paradise that evening; her heart felt warm and human, and what Puelvir would call "like folks." She held Matthew Launcelot lovingly, and told him the Lady of Shalott should never turn him off the parlor furniture and the lace pillow-shams, nor even from the fine white shawls he always preferred for cushions on muddy days. Matthew Launcelot kissed her gratefully, and heaved a long, long sigh. Those who love dogs know how much these deep sighs signify in their emotional history. Matthew Launcelot was very happy. Puelvir was happy, too. After her dishes were done, she sat out on the rocks and watched the sun go down, with a clean cooking-apron over her head. Puelvir could sing, herself, when she was happy. She sang a verse of a hymn she liked:—

"Set *ye*—e—ee your tre—a—as—ure *i*—in the skyes!
Where *thie*—e—eeves break *throu*—ough nor steal!"

She sang on a high and solemn quaver. The summer boarders, strolling on the bright, wet beach, looked up and smiled to hear her. It

was a gentle, affectionate night. The waves patted the grim rocks like children's fingers. The sky was the color of the rose which we call *La France*. The air was fresh and tender. All the outgrowth of the sea had a joyous mood. Peace was in Paradise. Even Zero went over to the stable to stroke the Lady of Shalott, lest she should be homesick. (If the truth must be told, the Lady resented this, because Zero had been stripping mackerel.) But Mary lighted a lamp, and sat down in a halo of mosquitoes to write to Mr. Sinuous. She missed him. This is the unfortunate difference between an old maid and a young wife. Corona and Puelvir, who missed nobody, felt that they had the advantage.

V.

FEE-FI-FUM AND I. O. U.

CORONA and Mary went to Boston to get Mr. Thumb's ready money for the Lady of Shalott. It proved to be a very warm day. The two ladies left the shore with the passionate regret of "summer people" doomed to a day in town. To put off the short, straight, sturdy beach-dress, and to put on flounces and a waist with a lining across the shoulders ; to leave behind the shade-hat that hangs like the arch of merciful heaven between one's eyes and the July sun, and to be abandoned to a piece of lace and an artificial flower on top of the head ; to squeeze tanned hands into tight gloves, and happy feet set at ease by tennis-shoes into new boots with a French heel ; to begin to grow warm in the omnibus, too warm at the station, miserable

at the first stop, desperate at Beverly, dangerous at Salem, frantic at Chelsea, and past praying for by the time one reaches Somerville, — this is to go to town from Fairharbor in July. To gasp for one blessed breath like a Cape Ann mackerel in a dory ; to find one's necessary errands dwindling to an inconceivable minimum by the time the open horse-car comes in sight of the Old South Church ; to become convinced before you turn up Temple Place that everything you came in for can wait better than not till December ; to flee to Parker's and call for ice, and tell the waiter you have had a sun-stroke ; to sit clinging to the time-table of the Eastern Division, for dear life, in fierce demand for an earlier than the earliest train that will take you home again ; to divide the blistering moments by wondering how the cashier and head waiter bear it, and by visions of getting into your bathing-clothes, and wading out, barefoot, neck-deep into that great, brown, blessed wave which is at this instant wasting itself in front of your deserted door ; to vow that if you

ever see that wave and that door once more, the contents of the Safety Vaults of State Street and the Equitable Building could not tempt you to leave again till the first snow-storm, — this is to go to town from Fairharbor in July.

The ladies went. It was warm, — very warm. They found Corona's man of business. He looked warm, — too warm. They sat and mopped and sopped and fanned and looked at each other with a civil endurance during the transaction of the errand. Corona felt that the broker regarded it as a very small errand to be troubled with on a day like that. She missed Tom, who had been her usual adviser, and hoped she should make no mistake which would endanger the financial interests of the country.

"You see," she explained, "I am going to make a purchase to-morrow that requires a good deal of ready money. My bank account won't meet it."

"A new *portière*, perhaps? Or a Persian rug?" inquired the gentleman, smiling idly.

He was an old friend of the family, and privileged to a certain amount of chaffing, in consideration of the trouble that friendship (especially a lady's friendship) is sure to cost a business man.

When Corona told him that it was a new horse, the business man gave his eyebrows a Gothic arch.

"Brother select him for you?"

"My brother is in Canada. I selected the horse myself."

"Ah?" said the business man. But he said no more. He knew where his business ended and hers began; or, more probably, it was too warm to express his reflections. They bubbled and melted away into that kind of inane and mute compassion with which one regards other people's affairs in July in Boston.

"I must sell a bond," said Corona, — "a small bond. I thought I would like to ask your advice about it. I promised to pay for the horse to-morrow."

"Good horse?" asked the man of business, hesitating.

"I think so," said Corona. "I trusted a man to do the right thing by me."

"*Trusted — a man ?*" cried the broker, forgetting himself. "About a *horse ?*"

"I did," firmly. "I don't know that it would be any worse to be cheated trusting than to be cheated suspecting. Would it?"

"Possibly not," mused the broker. He looked as if he had never thought of that.

"Assuming, of course," said Corona, "that I am to be cheated anyhow."

"Oh ! yes," said the business man, promptly, "assuming that, anyhow. But about this bond ? You might sell your 'Phi Beta Kappa and Alpha and Omega,' — that Arizona bond, you know."

"Phi Beta Kappa is a thousand-dollar bond, is n't it," objected Corona. "I don't want to sell a *large* investment."

"There's your Horse Railroad Scrip in Scatteree ; I think you have six shares of that, if I remember."

"I've forgotten where Scatteree is," pleaded Corona, with humility. She was apt to forget where things were.

The broker reminded her that Scatteree was in Yucatan.

"Or," he suggested, "you could part with one of those New Jerusalem City 6s Water Loan. They are selling at — Dick! What's New Jerusalem 6s Water Loan quoted at to-day? One hundred and seventeen and three quarters? You could sell for one hundred and seventeen and three quarters."

"I've no doubt I might," replied Corona, looking as intelligent as possible, and trying valiantly not to laugh at the expression of lady-like vagueness, not unmingled with alarm, on Mary's face. Mary had never been down State Street before. Mr. Sinuous attended to that. "But I have a fancy to hold on to the New Jerusalem 6s for a while."

"In view of a rise?" asked the broker.

"Oh! no; only I like the name."

"I must save that," said the broker. "I must tell your brother that. He would appreciate it as much as anybody I know. Well, how would you like to sell — Here! I have it! Have n't you some stock in the 'Im-

mediate Alarm Company for Waking up Servants by Electricity'? No? I thought you had. Hm-m-m. Have you a few shares of the 'Every Man his own Correspondent'? That concern which has patented a type-writer to answer letters without dictation. That thing you wind up, you know, and let it alone; and it goes off and replies to everybody in a neat circular adapted to the case, and no trouble to you. It's quite an invention. It is n't on the market yet; but the shares have gone up to four hundred already. It is expected to revolutionize modern society. It is especially constructed with reference to autograph-hunters, I am told, and people asking for advice and loans. It's a great thing. You ought to have some."

"Let me see," added the broker, after a moment's thought. "Don't you own some of the Fee-Fi-Fum?"

"I believe I do, — a little; I'm not sure how much. I shall be perfectly willing to part with that."

"The Fee-Fi-Fum and the I. O. U.?"

"Yes. I'm sure I have."

"The Fee-Fi-Fum and the I. O. U., leased by the X. Y. Z."

"Yes. I believe it is leased by the X. Y. Z."

"There we have it," said the broker. "You had better sell a \$500 bond of that. Have you a record?"

Yes, she had a record; she produced it.

"Take a duplicate copy," said the broker, "in case of accident. I'll read it off to you. I'll trouble you to write as fast as you can: 'Registered Bond, No. 30,075 of the Fee-Fi-Fum and the I. O. U.' Got that?"

Yes, she had that.

"And the I. O. U., in Dakota?"

"I had n't anything about Dakota," interrupted Corona.

"That is an important point. Add 'in Dakota.' You must distinguish, you know, from the I. O. U. in New Mexico. Those are 4s and mature in '88."

"Oh! yes; so I must. So they do," said Corona, with her keenest State Street expression. "I see. I have it now. I. O. U. in Dakota. Go on."

“ ‘Leased by the X. Y. Z. and Yankosell.’ Have you got the ‘X. Y. Z. and Yankosell’ ? ‘First Mortgage Land Grant, Non-Exempt, Redeemable in 2009. Interest payable 1st January at Behring’s Strait.’ Have you got all that ? ‘Nine and three tenths per cent.’ That’s all. Now, you just get that bond out of your vaults and take it to Jump & Jiggles in Merchant’s Trapeze. Jump & Jiggles deal in Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. more than I do. They’ll do it quicker for you. You must get there before two o’clock. Take a bank check, and be careful of it. If anything happens you don’t get it sold to-day, and you don’t want to come in again ” —

“The entire rolling stock of the Fee-Fi-Fum Railroad Company,” observed Corona, “would not tempt me to come in again this summer.”

“I don’t blame you,” said the broker, sadly. “I would n’t if I were you. In that case, your Fairharbor bank will tell you how to dispose of it on the spot, I’ve no doubt. The Fee-Fi-Fum is as good as a national silver bill.

Almost any solid business man in Fairharbor would be glad to take it off your hands. The Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. is n't often on the market. People jump at it. You'll have no more trouble — a little bond like this — than you would with a check. It's registered, which makes it perfectly safe. But you might as well sell it if you have time. Don't carry the cash with you. Better express whatever you carry, — if you know your expressman. It's safer than a lady's shopping-bag. Can I do anything more for you? My regards to your brother. Good-morning. I hope your horse will be worth it. Good-morning."

As luck would have it, by the time the ladies had stopped for Mary to get some iced soda, and to match some tulle, and get a paper of invisible hair-pins, and attend to a few other of those imperious errands which have to be done when one comes into town from seashore in July, — by the time Corona had obtained her Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. bond and reached the office of Messrs. Jump & Jiggles with it, the clock was striking two,

and Messrs. Jump & Jiggles had gone. At least, Mr. Jump had gone ; he was half-way to the Nahant boat. Mr. Jiggles was just closing the door, fanning himself with his hat as he did so, in the blasphemous kind of way in which men do use a fan, as if it were a cultivated substitute for a wicked word. But Mr. Jiggles said that they never did business (in July) after the clock struck.

So Corona (remembering the good broker's advice) decided to send her registered bond home by the expressman. It was the same expressman who had brought Matthew Launcelot to her house when Tom first presented him to her, and before the dog ran away and was bought over again by Mary, and given to his mistress the second time,— which Mary has never known to this day. So Corona naturally felt that she could trust the expressman ; he seemed intimately bound up in her family history. The expressman therefore took her bond and promised to deliver it that evening ; and the ladies took the next train home with fervent speed.

As they came in sight of the cottage, full into the force of the live east wind, which broke against their scarlet, dusty faces as if it had been a great wave itself, all the blazing city seemed to recede from their consciousness like a dream of a vast conflagration.

"I am becoming a native," said Corona. "I flop back to this coast like a Cape Ann fish into the sea. Do you suppose that broker is sizzling there yet?"

"It has been a little — warm," assented Mary, in her ladylike way. She felt that Corona overstated things.

Oh! but it was cool in Paradise! It was heavenly cool in Paradise. All the brown blinds were drawn; a warm and mellow gloom filled the gray parlor and the green bedroom. The old muslin curtains stirred delicately at the open windows, like sails in a slowly moving pleasure-boat. The flowers and ferns about the house seemed grateful for the shade and water. The modest upholstery and all the little, simple devices of this plain home were in cool summer tints, and met one restfully.

Matthew Launcelot was asleep (on his back, with all four paws in the air) on a large, embroidered linen towel, which he had dragged from the towel-rack and put directly in the draught on the straw carpet in the middle of the guest-room floor. He looked at least cool. Outside, Zero had the Lady of Shalott tied to the clothes-post in the east wind to feed upon the short cool grass. Puelvir, in a light muslin dress, with an old-fashioned green sprig on it, sat by the kitchen window with the fire out. Comforted by her cabbage, she was embroidering a linen night-dress, which she kept for fancy work ; she said she wanted one decent night-gownd to die in ; she was always in good spirits when she was working on this garment. As the ladies, fresh from their bath, roamed about the house in dainty *déshabillé*, they could hear her singing as she sang before :

“ Set *ye-e-ee* your *tre-a-as-ure* i-in the skyes, where *thie-ie-eeves* break *thro-ough*, nor ” —

“ There ’s the expressman ! ” cried Puelvir,

interrupting herself at this point. "He's brought a yellow package. It looks like an overgrown big telegraph. And land ! if he ain't got my peddler settin' alongside of him on the front seat."

"Who, pray, is your peddler ?" asked her mistress, hurrying down to receive her registered bond with an agitation which she flattered herself passed for masterly unconcern.

"Oh ! just a peddler come peddlin' to-day," replied Puelvir. "He peddled a patent kind of scented soft soap to save a girl scrubbin' of blankets and bed quilts, and a sort of dog-food he wanted me to buy for Matthew Launcelot. He was a very gentlemanly peddler ; he said I reminded him of a girl he knew that died, that he was fond of. I told him that mought be, but you was n't to home, and I could n't have nothin' to do with him in your absence. He was sot to come in and get a drink of ice water" —

"Mercy, Puelvir ! I hope you did n't let him ?"

“What do you take me for, Miss Corona?” said Puelvir, with dignity. “He sot on that there coal-bin, and there, I says, you may set. I don’t receive strange gentlemen when she ain’t to hum. So he sot on the coal-bin and I sot on the steps, and the dog he sot between us, and *he* raised the cannibal islands. I never see a creetur holler in my born days as that creetur hollered at that there peddler. He said he was a handsome dog, ’n Matthew up ’n at his trousers leg ’n bit a piece out, — they was nice trousers, of a checkered pattern, and become him very well, — and then he said the dog was a dam puppy, and then he went away. He said he was tired, and was agoin’ to get somebody to give him a lift over to the city. That ’s him. The expressman ’s picked him up. Yes, it ’s him.”

“Ah!” said Corona, coming out, with an air of supernatural lightness. “I see you have brought my package from the dye-house.”

“What ’m?” said the expressman.

“My package from the dye-house,” repeated Corona, severely.

“ Oh ! yes, marm, yes ! I see. I’ve got your package from the dye-house all right. In a hurry for it, I s’pose ? ”

The expressman winked as he handed over the Fee-Fi-Fum bond to the lady. It was ill-mannered, not to say dangerous, in the expressman ; but he did wink visibly. The peddler, sitting beside him, did not notice this, however ; which was a great relief to Corona. The long, yellow bond envelope, sealed and resealed with the great money-department seal of the great Adams Express Company, passed from the hands of the express-driver to the hands of the lady. But the peddler, unfamiliar with such matters, regarded it idly. If the seal of Lewando or Barrett thus protected a dyed ribbon or an old piece of lace, what was that to a peddler of dog-food and scented soft soap ?

He asked Corona if she would purchase any soap ; but said it was of no consequence, when she declined. He said his dog-food — But after this he said no more. There came a soft pattering upon the uncarpeted floor, an

unceremonious whisk of Puelvir's petticoats, a swift glimpse below them of a dark, offended, black-and-tan countenance, framed in white and green sprigged muslin — and Matthew Launcelot sprang, with one terrible snarl, upon that peddler of dog-food and scented soap. Over the wheel, into the wagon, past the expressman, upon the peddler, the terrier, in a lightning photograph, leaped convulsively. The expressman laughed and the peddler swore; but Matthew was in earnest. The horses started, the wagon reeled over the big bowlders, and rattled violently away — but Matthew Launcelot held on.

“He's gone out of sight with 'em!” cried Puelvir, greatly excited. “I'll bet he'll follow that peddler to prison, or the gallows, but he'll have another mouthful of them checked pantaloons. It's too bad; for they did become him.”

It was late that evening when Matthew Launcelot returned. He seemed tired and sleepy. He brought home a large piece of green checked pantaloon cloth, which he wor-

ried continually, as if it had been a rat that would n't die ; and, finally, hid it in the china-closet, in an empty Albert biscuit box he knew of. He tried to put the cover on, but he was too sleepy.

But Corona paid no attention to Matthew Launcelot. She and Mary sat in the parlor, with the door shut, and held the long yellow envelope, sealed with the seal of the Adams Express Company.

“What in the world am I to do to-night,” demanded Corona, “with this Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. Registered Bond, leased by the X. Y. Z. and Yankosell?”

VI.

THE BURGLARY.

IT is a matter of familiar observation that great truths are epidemic. Discoveries go in the atmosphere. The conditions of intellectual climate, which lead the human mind to work in a given direction at a given time and place, compel the other human mind across the world or across the village to the same intuition, inspiration, or deduction, at the corresponding season. While the ladies in the parlor were counting out their money, the servants in the kitchen of the Old Maids' Paradise, if not strictly eating bread and honey (doughnuts, to be precise, by means of which Puelvir was in the habit of bribing Zero to share with her the burdens of domestic life) — Puelvir and Zero were conducting the following dialogue.

Zero had wandered in, with something on

what he called his mind. But Zero was naturally reticent.

"Puelvir," he said, after the sixth doughnut had lubricated his reserve, "where does she keep her money?"

"Who put you up to that?" asked Puelvir, dropping a goblet, and giving the boy a look which would have done justice to Matthew Launceelot when he saw the peddler.

"I heerd some boys up-street sayin' she must have a sight. They asked me where she kep' it," replied Zero, in his listless, honest, stupid way.

"You just tell 'm," said Puelvir, "she ain't got none. Never has none. She's poor, Miss Corona is, only she's too proud to let on. You tell 'em I said so."

"Yes," said Zero, gently. "I'll tell 'em you said so."

"She keeps all her money in New York," added Puelvir, nonchalantly. "When she's got a bill to pay she has just enough come on to pay that bill, and pays it right away before supper. She has it come by ex——"

It comes by telephone. All her money comes by special arrangement with the Telephone Company. It's a new invention they have; her brother, he got 'em to do it for her. They don't do it for anybody else. Why, she's so hard up she has to borry of me. I lent her two dollars yesterday; Miss Mary's the same. She had to get fifty cents of me to pay the banana man. All your wages and mine come by telephone, and there can't nobody get the cash of 'em but herself. That's what she bought a horse for; to go over to get 'em, she has to go so often. You just tell them boys, now, won't you?"

"Yee-es," drawled Zero, "if they arx me, I'll tell 'em. I thought myself she must keep as much as twenty-six or seven dollars in the house. But I'll tell 'em."

But Corona and Mary in the parlor were consulting in whispers. The bond of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. lay upon Corona's lap.

Mary suggested that they telegraph to Mr. Thumb to come over and get it that night; she thought it would be such a relief. But

Corona replied that Mr. Thumb lived in North East Carriesquall, and that the telegraph had not reached — in fact, would never reach — to North East Carriesquall. They were in for it, she said, and must harbor that bond to-night, at all events. Neither of the ladies felt any fear of anything happening to the bond, unless, as Mary said, the house took fire; but the novelty of sleeping in the house with a registered bond oppressed them. It was as if they had too much company, and no spare room.

“I wish I’d asked the broker where to put it,” observed Corona. “He might have known.”

“What is the I. O. U.?” asked Mary, meditatively. “What does it stand for?”

“I don’t know,” confessed Corona.

“And what is Yankosell? What does that mean?”

“I did know that,” said Corona, brightening. “But I’ve forgotten.”

“Does n’t anybody know?” asked Mary.

“I never heard of anybody that did,” said

Corona. "I dare say the Treasurer does. I'll ask Tom. What should you think of putting this bond in the parlor stove-pipe?"

But Mary objected that there might be a cold northeast storm in the morning, and Puelvir might light a fire. Mary suggested taking a few nails out of the carpet and slipping it under. But Corona thought that had been tried too often. She believed the house always did take fire when that was done.

They discussed the question of hiding it behind the books in the library; but Corona's sea-side library consisted of a book-case with two shelves and a top that held the dictionary. Corona proposed taking the bond to her own bedroom; but Mary said that was tempting Providence to commit a murder. Mary added that she thought this was a very dangerous way to live — without any man about; and that she had had a letter from Mr. Sinuous, saying he wanted her to come home this week.

Corona asked if it seemed to be any easier living without a woman about. But Mary did not see the force in what she considered a feeble joke cast at a serious matter.

She talked a great deal that evening about the loneliness of Corona's unprotected life.

"Unprotected fiddle-de-dee!" said Corona, with more spirit than politeness.

After much conversation and contemplation, it was decided how to dispose of the registered bond of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U., for that one night; and Mr. Thumb would be on the spot early on that "day after to-morrow" to which a single night's repose would now swiftly bring this excited and wearied family. The bond was put into a drawer in Corona's desk, which stood at the head of the sofa in the parlor — a natural and suitable place, which both ladies approved of. Corona locked the drawer and took the key, and said they would say nothing to anybody — not even to Puelvir. They locked up the house with their usual fidelity; perhaps with a little more than that; but nothing was done about clothes-lines, or hose, or hot water, or any of those modern improvements in burglar alarms, because that would involve explaining to Puelvir that they were sleeping in the same house

with a \$500 registered bond. They were all tired and went early to bed.

“Where is Matthew Launcelot?” asked Corona, remembering at half-past nine that she had not seen the dog that evening.

“I don’t know whether he’s dead or deaf,” said Puelvir, carelessly. “Or mebbe he mought be tired wrastlin’ with that scented soft-soap peddler; but I can’t wake the critter nohow. He just dropped down alongside the Albert biscuit box in the China closet, with one of his paws — see! — laid acrosst that piece of green-check he brought home, and there he lays. He’s ben asleep since ever he come home. I tried to wake him to put him to bed; but you mought as well set out to wake Methuselah’s mother-in-law. It ain’t no moral use.”

“Poor little fellow!” said Corona, idly. “He does seem tired. Let him sleep.”

But Mary’s mind continued to dwell on Corona’s unprotected situation. Mary’s mind sometimes worked in a way peculiar to herself. When Corona was passing into her first cool

dream, at the close of that warm and worried day, she was startled by hearing her door open (it was not locked), and Mary glided in, with all her long, bright hair down over her ruffled and embroidered night-dress, looking in the moonlight (for it was moonlight) like a lovely etching on mellow Japanese paper.

“Corona,” said Mary, “I just came in to ask a question. What has ever become of—— ——?”

She mentioned a name at which Corona’s placid, healthy heart gave one bound, and then stood still.

“He’s out West somewhere, I believe,” she answered, with magnificent carelessness.

“Oh!” said Mary. “I didn’t know but you’d kept that up, somehow, and not cared to talk about it.”

“I don’t know what has become of him, I’m sure,” replied Corona. “I did not think it best to keep anything up.”

“I always thought you made a mistake, dear,” said Mary, stooping to kiss her in the faint light. Her pretty hair fell over Corona’s

face, as she stooped. "I hoped you had n't cut everything entirely off."

"Atropos cuts," said Corona, laughing — as women laugh when they would n't cry for the world and all that is therein. "All we do is to look on. Don't get to thinking about my old flirtations, Mollie, at this time of night. There! Go back to bed, you pretty creature, and go to sleep."

So Mary did; but Corona lay long awake; too long; so long that she was quite spent at last, from sleeplessness and for other reasons, and slept, when she slept, almost as heavily as Matthew Launcelot down below there, prone by the Albert biscuit box, with one paw across the green-checked mouthful of the peddler's pantaloons.

They had a late breakfast next morning, and the little family collected leisurely. Mary and Puelvir were in excellent spirits; but Corona felt tired, and Matthew Launcelot was depressed and non-committal. He still slept a good deal, and treated his breakfast of mackerel and griddle-cakes with an ill-concealed contempt.

The ladies were still at the breakfast-table talking lazily ; Corona had sent word to Zero to have the Lady of Shalott brought round to the clothes-post at ten o'clock ; Mary had said that she believed she must go home before Sunday. She had just asked what time Mr. Thumb was coming for his ready money, when Puelvir flung open the kitchen door without ceremony, and rushed into the dining-room.

"Land, land, land, land !" cried Puelvir. "Somebody's broke in !"

"Broken in where ?" asked her mistress, without interest. Puelvir's burglars were becoming an old story.

"Broke in *here* ! That there two-foot winder is smashed in. I never see it till this minute ; and one of my squash-pies is ate, and some tomayto sauce. There's been burglars in this house, this livin' night, as I say these words, or I'm a widder with five, and left with a property !"

Corona and Mary looked at each other. Corona turned pale, but she commanded herself. She felt in a confused way that some

one must command somebody. She pushed back her chair quietly, went into her little gray parlor, and up to the desk.

Every drawer in the desk but one was taken out and overturned. A *mélange* of letters and grocers' books lay upon the floor. The drawer which had not been taken out was the one which had contained the \$500 registered bond. It was quite empty.

The first thing which Corona did was to call Puelvir — the only creature in the world on whom she really depended. Instinct went out to that one in the tension of emergency. She briefly explained to Puelvir the dreadful fact. Puelvir herself turned very pale; then the color came and came in waves over her gaunt, high-cheeked, homely face.

“Miss Corona, if you 'd *told* me, I 'd ha set up all night long to watch your property! And you KNOW I would!”

But Puelvir's rebuke stopped here, for that moment and for all time. She felt that her mistress had been punished enough.

The three women shut and locked the doors

and searched the house ; but the bond was gone. They sifted the mass of papers with terrible conscientiousness ; but the bond was gone. Puelvir would seize on something, and say, " Ain't this it, now ? " and Corona would reply that that was last year's fish bill. Mary would say she believed she had found it, and Corona would say, " That ? , Oh ! that 's nothing but an offer from a widower." Then Mary would snatch up something else and say this *must* be it, and Corona would admit that it was a rejected Sunday-school book from a New Orleans firm. Then Puelvir would declare she 'd got it now, and Corona would shake her head and file away her fire-insurance policy. Once Corona thought she had found the bond herself ; but it proved to be Tom's doctor's bill for the baby from New Year's to April Fool's Day. The values were so nearly equivalent that the mistake was natural. But the bond was gone. They looked up the stove-pipe ; they ripped the carpets ; they took every book out of the book-case (this was Mary's idea) ; but the bond was

gone. They examined the pantry, and the two-foot window, the squash-pie plate, and the tomato dish. But the bond was gone. A red lead pencil and a piece of tobacco lay upon the woodpile. These were the only traces left by the burglar. The front door was found unlocked. The intruder had entered by the wood-shed window, helped himself to the contents of the larder, wandered freely about the lower story of the cottage, passed safely by Matthew Launcelot, who had offered no personal objections —

“Where is that dog, now?” asked Corona, in a voice destitute of affection.

“Layin’ on your white muslin wrapper — the one I just done up — in your bed-room, sleepin’ like a cherubim on a monymment,” said Puelvir. “He’s slep like the sperits of the just made perfect ever since I shooed him out the china closet come breakfast time.”

The burglar, it seemed, having passed by this dangerous animal without peril, had leisurely rummaged the contents of the table-drawers — (Corona was convinced that he had

read the widower's love-letter by the circumstantial evidence of a little whiff of cigar ashes which tumbled out as she picked it up) — he had helped himself to the \$500 bond, comfortably let himself out of the front door; and that was all.

“Did you lock the drawer?” asked Mary.

“Why, yes. Don't you remember? Here is the key in my pocket.”

“Did you lock the *upper* drawer?” asked Puelvir.

“I never thought of the upper drawer!” wailed Corona.

“And he just pulled it out, and tucked his hand into the one below, and took that there money out, and no trouble to nobody! He war n't even put to the onconvenience of breakin a lock to git it!”

“Exactly so. That is just what he did,” assented Corona.

She laughed. The thing struck her so that she could n't have helped it, if it had cost her all she owned. She rolled over on the sofa, and laughed till she cried.

“She always takes trouble that way,” said Mary, without laughing. “Come away, Puelvir, and let us consult what it is best to do. Don’t you think I’d better telegraph for Mr. Sinuous?”

But there was no doubt about it. The Old Maid’s Paradise, taken by a thief in the night, had been ingeniously robbed; and that Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. registered bond, leased by the X. Y. Z. and Yankosell, was gone.

At this moment Puelvir came in to say that the new horse was waiting outside for somebody to go to ride with him; Zero was tryin’ to make the critter eat an apple-tart and a piece of cold tongue; and that Mr. Thumb was turnin’ in the gate, come for his ready money.

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“Take her back, if you want to, Mr. Thumb. Take the Lady Betty back, and keep her till you find out if I have any money to pay you. You may feel better to do so.”

“You mean, you think I would n’t trust

you with my horse, marm, long 's you wanted to keep her on trial, if you like her?"

"Oh, no; we would n't put it so. But I'm bankrupt to-day, you see. I can't give you your ready money, as I said I would. If I should never recover it, I don't see how I'm going to pay for the horse at all. I never was robbed before. I cannot form any plans."

"I calc'lated," said Mr. Thumb, after a silence, "I calc'lated to leave the mare jest where she is till you send her back to North East Carriesquall."

.
"Oh, you'll recover your bonds," said an unfamiliar voice, with easy assurance. "Of course you'll recover your bond. It's too thin not to be recovered."

Corona looked up in alarm. A strange man stood in the parlor. He had entered by the back door, strolled through the kitchen and the dining-room without the least trace of what could be called hesitation, and pushed his way, unannounced, to the centre of that

little group of burgled people. As he spoke, he took an easy chair, and made himself at home without the superfluity of an invitation. After some thought, he removed his hat, with the reluctance of a man who is not habitually placed where he feels obliged to do so, and glanced agreeably around him.

“Really,” began Corona, “I have n’t the pleasure” —

But Puelvir was before her. Puelvir made one bound across the room, gripped the stranger with both her powerful hands, and before the ferocity of her intentions occurred to anybody, shook the man (and he was a big man, too) till his teeth chattered in his head and his eyes glared from their sockets.

“*Be you the feller?*” she demanded. “Be you the burglar that burgled this here house?”

“Why, my dear young woman” — gasped the stranger.

“I’m not your dear young woman!” retorted Puelvir, virtuously. “F ain’t nobody’s dear young woman. Never was. Never will be. *Be you the burg—*”

“Look a here,” said the visitor, releasing himself with a practiced thrust which sent Puelvir sitting down hard upon the rejected Sunday-school book and the widower’s love-letter, “I am the Fairharbor police.”

VII.

MR. PUSHETT.

“OH!” said the mistress of the burgled cottage, doubtfully, to the Fairharbor policeman. “We are very much obliged to you. How did you know about it?”

“Know about it!” echoed the policeman. “There ain’t a lobster nor a stripped mackerel in the city don’t know about it by this time. Know about it, I should say! Why, it happened as much as an hour ago, did n’t it?”

“It is just about an hour since we discovered our loss,” replied Corona. Already she perceived that it would be best to suppress surprise at anything that might happen now in any direction. The robbery had added this contribution to her stock of worldly knowledge before she had left the room in which it occurred.

“Now,” began the policeman, immediately, “show me the premises. My name, by the way, is Pushett.”

Corona meekly obeyed Mr. Pushett. He was a very tall policeman, and he kept bumping his head against the low ceilings of the Old Maid’s Paradise, whose sheltered walls had never known a guest like this before. The policeman examined the two-foot window; he pocketed the red pencil and piece of tobacco; he studied the squash-pie plate with a professional manner for a long time; he gave close attention to the tomato dish. He remarked, at intervals, that she would certainly recover her bond. He said the red pencil was a very important clew. He said the pie-plate indicated that the chap had a good appetite, and was fond of squash-pie; he said these were both excellent clews. He did not value the tobacco so highly, because so many gentlemen were smokers. He rummaged the house thoroughly, up-stairs and down. In reply to Corona’s protest that the burglar had n’t been up-stairs, he asked her

how she knew? He gave special attention to the spare room, pleasantly stating that he thought the fellow might have slept there. He criticised the defenses of the doors and windows, as being arranged by women-folks, and all you could expect. He examined the desk and the heap of papers; he seemed interested in the widower's love-letter, and advised Corona to put her insurance policy in a safe place.

"Didn't lock the upper drawers, did you?" with a slow grin. "Made it easy as you could for him, didn't you?"

"I tried to," observed Corona, with some spirit.

"That's right. They most always do," replied the policeman. "One man I knew took 'n put every dollar he was worth in a safe in his house, and kept it there a year, and he had n't any bolt to his front door, and one night four masked men just took a nipper and some crow-bars and turned the key as easy as you 'd take a cork out of a homœopathy bottle, and took that safe out on the

crow-bar and carried it into an empty lot and blew it open, and made off with every cent there was in it, and nobody the wiser till mornin'."

"I hope the poor man recovered his property?" said Corona, eagerly, with that sudden widening of the sympathy which comes from experience.

"Well, n-no," admitted Mr. Pushett. "I can't say he did recover anything — in that case. I believe it has never been found."

"Nor the burglars, either?"

"Oh, no! Nor the burglars either. In *that* case."

Corona asked the policeman why he felt so confident that the property would be recovered in her case. Oh! this, he said, was a very simple affair. This was altogether too thin. All he'd ask was one good clew, and he would undertake to see the property back inside of a month. This was very encouraging. And Corona and Mary thought Mr. Pushett quite an agreeable policeman.

"I thought you said the tomayto dish was a clew," sniffed Puelvir.

“It was the squash-pie plate,” corrected the policeman, with majesty. He and Puelvir did not get on at all. “I referred to the pie-plate. It is an excellent clew so far as it goes. It would be well to have something more — as you might say — more illuminative. But these are professional matters, and not easy to explain. Now, Madam,” said Mr. Pushett, waving Puelvir out of the subject, and producing his note-book and pencil, with an air of scholarly absorption. “I want the details of this case, if you please ; all of ’em. Name of the bond ? ”

“Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U.,” replied Corona, promptly. She knew it by heart, now, —

“Past all doubting, truly,
A knowledge greater than loss could dim.”

“The Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. \$500 bond. Registered. Leased by the X. Y. Z. and Yanko ” —

“Hold on a minute. That seems to be a fourteen-barreled bond. ‘Yanko ’ ” —

“Sell ; X. Y. Z. and Yankosell. In Da-

kota. Be sure you write in *Dakota*. It's important to distinguish from the Yankosell in New Mexico, which are fours, and mature in '88."

"Did I understand you this bond matures in '88?"

"Oh, no! It's the New Mexico bond that matures in '88. It's a very important point."

"I don't see what that has to do with your Fee-Fi-Fum," objected Mr. Pushett.

"Neither do I," said Corona, helplessly. "I never did. But the broker told me it was very important. I think you'd better put it down." So Mr. Pushett put it down.

"Mature in '88. Is that all? No? Fire away, then. We have n't any time to lose. A burglar might get to Canada by the time a man got this bond recorded. No. 30,075. Land Grant. First Mortgage. Non-Exempt. Redeemable in 2000. I've got so far. 2009. Interest collected 1st January, at Behring's Strait. Nine and three-tenths per cent. There. You don't mean to say that's all? Discourages me a little. Any fellow who's

had the luck to get such a bond as that is likely to be overtaken by old age or the gallows before he can read it. Now then," proceeded Mr. Pushett, "allow me to ask you a few necessary professional questions. I'll make 'em few as possible. Where did you ladies sleep last night? Sleep well? Apt to sleep well? What kept you awake? What did you eat for supper? Callers in the evening? Who was they? What was the thermometer on the piazza? What in your room? Was the clock wound up? Had you read the evening paper? What train did you take from Boston? How many times have you been to Boston this summer? Are you taxed in Fairharbor? Are you on the voting list? What was the price agreed upon for your house? What are your views on Prohibition? Are you a woman suffragist? Why did you send your bond home by express? Which express? Driver alone? Who was with him? Did you do much shopping in Boston? Who's your broker? Where's your brother? If you'd voted at

the last Presidential election, should you have been a Mugwump? What is your receipt for sponge cake? Did you notice which way the wind blew last night? Lost a paper of tacks in the last local robbery? Easily scared? Keep fire arms? Many gentlemen callers at your place? Ain't keeping company with anybody, are you? Do you own a dog?"

This last question brought Matthew Launcelot to the foreground. Puelvir carried him into the parlor in her arms. Matthew exhibited little interest in the family misfortunes. He was still disgracefully sleepy. Puelvir stood him up on all fours, and the dog winked and blinked at the policeman and toppled over and sat down gaping. He presented at that moment as few of the points of a reliable family watch-dog as any reasonable mind could demand.

"Tan terrier, too," mused the policeman, "and good breed. What's that the dog's worryin' between his paws?"

Puelvir hastened to explain that it was a

piece of the pantaloons of the peddler of the dog-food and scented soft soap. She told the story from her point of view, with comments and addenda ; but she told the story. The policeman asked a question or two ; mused for a moment or two ; then across his countenance there passed a sudden professional glow. He stooped over Matthew Launcelot seductively, and tried to take away from him the green-checked mouthful of woolen cloth. But Matthew's jaws, with a dogged snarl, closed upon the fingers of the defender of the laws. They closed quickly and they closed hard. Matthew's jaws could shut like a patent self-closing safety-vault door. The policeman withdrew his fingers with a muttered exclamation : —

“ Ma — dam ! ” he hesitated just a little between the syllables while he tied his handkerchief about his bleeding hand. “ You have an excellent dog there. *He's* got your clew. He has been drugged, tremendously drugged ; dog-food, I should say ! I am surprised he is alive. The peddler was the thief.

Soft soap, he said, did he? The peddler is the burglar, and that piece of pantaloon stuff will track him down anywhere in North America. Take care of your dog. He will be needed as a witness. It is a very neat case. You will certainly recover your property. I advise you to have some circulars printed immediately. It won't cost you much. Better have five hundred. We'll distribute for you. I'd offer a pretty tolerable reward, if I was you. I'll keep the red pencil. I'll thank you for that pie-plate; it had better be kept at the office. If any of you ladies can separate that dog and the peddler's remains, I'll thank you for *that*. We have an admirable chain of clews. Good morning."

As soon as the policeman had gone, Corona said she would act upon his advice, and immediately get the circulars printed, which were not to cost anything, and which would offer a tolerable reward. So she ordered the Lady of Shalott (with Tom's buggy and the second harness), to drive over to the printer's.

She said what a comfort it was to own a horse, and Zero appeared at that moment at the front door, with his hat on, to say that the mare had lost a shoe off her sou' by sou'-west hind foot, and all the rest was loose, and she'd got to go to the blacksmith's. Zero thought it would take two hours, and that the best way would be for him to ride her over.

"I bet nobody'll burgle this house to-night," said Puelvir, grimly, when her mistress and the Lady of Shalott returned from the printer's at six o'clock that evening. "I've bought a pound more of long shingle nails. I've druv one in most everywhere a nail could be drove. I've got my fire up and three kettles bilin', and my hose on, and a row of empty buckets setting alongside my bed. I'm ready for 'em."

In vain Corona protested that of all nights in a lifetime this was the safest night in the Old Maid's Paradise; that she would leave the doors open to-night, and all the windows, without a tremor; that no family on the face

of the earth was safer than the family that had just been robbed. Puelvir was firm. She was almost frightened. Mary was altogether so. Mary begged so hard for a man to sleep in the house that Corona scornfully yielded the point ; and old Father Morrison was towed in, and tucked away on a sofa bed in the parlor, where he snored all night till Paradise shook, and Mary said if she lived till morning she would go home to her husband, and Corona could do as she pleased.

At eleven o'clock that night there did, indeed, an event occur which did not add to the calm of the occasion. Some one knocked thunderously at the back door. Mary shrieked. Corona put her slippers on. Matthew Launcelot uttered a debilitated bark and sauntered out to the door, wagging his tail hospitably. Father Morrison slept through the disturbance quite peacefully. But Puelvir filled all her water-pails, and dashed the contents of three out of the window, without looking to see if they hit.

At this point the intruder hastened to ex-

plain that it was only Mr. Pushett; and if the young woman and the dog would let him alone long enough, he'd like to see the lady of the house on very important business.

"But I can't let you in," said Corona, when she had hastened to the back door. "Puelvir has put so many shingle nails in this door."

"I don't want to come in," whispered the policeman through the key-hole. "I want you to come *out*."

"Want me to come out?"

"Yes; I've got a clew."

"But I can't *get* out!" objected Corona. "She said she put in a pound. It would take me all night to draw them" —

"Try the front door," suggested the officer, not unnaturally.

"But the front door's nailed, too. I can't get out there, either."

"I've heard of burglar-proof houses," said the policeman, "but a family-proof house I never saw before. Calculate to *stay* in, do

you? Looks like it. Do you think you could get out a window?"

Corona replied that the lower windows were all nailed, too. She suggested, however, that she might climb over the piazza if she had a tall step-ladder; and Mr. Pushett replied that he guessed he could help her; it was dark; and she'd better come. He added that he could saw through the house anywhere in twenty minutes and let her out; but he was in a hurry.

So Corona descended by the step-ladder (she was a pretty good climber), and the officer explained that he wanted her to ride seven miles with him and see a man. He was confident he was on a clew. He thought he had found the man. But he wanted her to identify, before he arrested. It did not occur to Corona to demur. Anything might happen to a person who had been robbed of a \$500 bond. So she and Mr. Pushett went over to the barn and got the Lady of Shalott, and drove away in the dark; for the moon was under a thunder-cloud. She noticed, as they

rode along, that the policeman dripped a good deal, and he explained that one of that young woman's water-buckets had hit him a little ; he said she was rather too spirited a young woman for his taste.

The Lady made excellent time, and took her seven miles in forty-five minutes. Corona, as she and the policeman sped over the lonely country, felt her heart warm toward the pretty horse. It was depressing to think that she might never be able to pay for her. But Mr. Pushett assured her that he had as good a clew as he ever got hold of in his professional life. He said all he wanted of her was to look in a window at some fellows playing cards.

This sounded easy ; but Corona's heart sank a little. She thought of what Mary said about her unprotected life. She thought of those other things Mary had said that night when she came in looking like a Japanese etching in the moonlight. But the policeman's shoulders were big, and Corona's pluck was bigger. As she rode along on her un-

usual errand, through that memorable midnight, she reflected that, after all, if she had any one to call on to track her own burglars for her, he would probably be a very busy person ; his rest would be more important than hers ; and she should be perfectly wretched if she could not do such a thing herself and save him the trouble ; which, possibly, she might not be allowed to do. This consoled her so much that she was in excellent spirits by the time they reached the window through which Mr. Pushett wanted her to look.

“ You did n’t tell me it was a grog-shop,” said Corona, drawing back for an instant.

“ I ’ll take care of you,” said the officer, curtly. So Corona and the policeman drew near to the window and looked in. Four men sat at a table, in the ill-favored place, gambling for whiskey.

“ There ! ” whispered the officer, breathlessly. “ Ain’t that the feller ? That peaked one, with the yellow goatee ? Ain’t that the peddler ? Just you look as you never looked in your born days. Ain’t that him ? ”

“I never saw the man before in all my life,” whispered Corona. “He does n’t look any more like that peddler than he looks like the Episcopal minister.” The officer’s face fell over a precipice two hundred feet sheer. Was she sure? Take her oath to it? She must be mistaken. Would she take the trouble to look again? The clew —

At this moment the man with the goatee arose and shuffled to the outer door. He was very drunk. The officer whisked Corona into the buggy by one swift and mighty whisk; and they were driving quite leisurely by, when the man appeared on the door-step. He sat down stupidly for a minute, then staggered wretchedly away; there was n’t much of him even for a drunkard; he was a poor, sunken, sodden creature, soul and body. He reeled into a miserable home near by. The officer drove up softly and watched him. A woman in a lank dress came out to meet the drunkard; she held a smoky kerosene-lamp above her head, and looked at him; a sick baby lay upon the other arm, wailing fretfully. The

woman said, "Joshuay, is that you?" She made no comment upon his condition; she was too used to it. He rolled in, and fell over against her and down upon the floor; she looked at him apathetically, and then she shut the door.

"There is something wrong about this clew," said Corona. "Take me home, Mr. Pushett."

And Mr. Pushett meekly took her home. He was so disappointed that Corona felt quite sorry for him. The thunder-storm had come on, and it rained and lightened all the way home. The mare was a good deal disturbed at the whole adventure—the matter not having been fully explained to her; but she behaved like a Lady-as-she-Ought, and Corona reached her step-ladder soaked and safe, and climbed back to bed, as much impressed with Mr. Pushett's energy as she was with his success.

In the morning she did not get up early, having a headache, and Puelvir said she would send her breakfast up to her. Corona no-

ticed that Puelvir did not say she would bring the breakfast, but concluded it was one of Puelvir's eccentricities. Corona was lying half asleep, half awake, feeling that morning a little unprotected, after all, and almost lonely, — for Mary had gone home to her husband, as she said she should, — when she was startled by heavy groping foot-falls and smothered exclamations that seemed to be struggling for dear life with the breakfast-tray up the narrow and unlighted stairs. Immediately a big, broad fellow loomed into the room, smiling like a sun-flower across the waiter, on which he had upset the coffee and overturned the butter-pat into the berries and cream, and straightway took her into his arms, waiter, pillow, coffee, and all, as nobody else in the world —

“Why, Tom! Why, Tom!”

“Did you think I'd leave you in the lurch?” asked Tom, sitting down on the foot of the bed to mop up a few little trout-brooks of coffee that were rapidly changing the topography of the bed-spread. “I told Puelvir

to let me bring your breakfast and surprise you. She said you'd take me for a burglar, and shoot. I told her I'd risk your hitting anybody. I did n't think I should spill *all* the coffee."

"But I thought you were in Canada! Not to come home for three weeks. This is three days. You — you — you dear old — you — Tom!"

"Oh, yes," said Tom, carelessly; "I was in Canada. But I had an errand over in Hoboken, so I saw it in the papers."

"The *papers*?"

"Why, certainly. Every newspaper east of the Rocky Mountains is ringing with it. They say there were five, and you shot two. They say you lost \$100,000 in Union Pacific and Bell Telephone. They say you were wounded in the lungs and hardly expected to live. So I thought if it was so bad as that, I'd better stop over a train. I took the sleeper. I've got to go back by the 4 P. M. express. I can stay, — let me see, — I can stay two hours and a half."

VIII.

THE STATE WILL PROTECT.

ALL Fairharbor was at her bloom. The summer sun made mirrors of the soft gray water; the summer people started on the beach, like flowers in a huge *parterre*; the winds were laid, or low; the moons burned with a white fire, like the hearts of loving women, and repeated themselves in the waves, fair and unconscious, as love reflects itself in deeds, and knows not that it does so. Pleasure boats, with colored sails, tinted by artists astray, stole by upon the idle flood that made a merry mock at them. Voices of singers on the cliffs or on the water melted late down the silver and the purple evenings, and sung the soul to sleep with the power of old songs. All the world was at play, or adream. Cares were corked like the Genius in the bottle in

the Arabian story ; anxieties and fears waited as the frosts wait, biding their time ; but it was not the time of summer in Fairharbor. Sickness cheated itself with distraction. Sorrow drugged itself with the sound of the tides that said : "Thou art but another wave in the eternal sea." Hope fed itself upon the stir of pleasure-seeking human pulses ; youth tripped to the time of the wave-notes, and love maddened itself with beauty ; for summer was on Fairharbor.

But in the Old Maid's Paradise these things served as a background to a preoccupied family. The business of life went remorselessly on. Tom had crowded so much advice and affection into those two hours and a half that Corona resumed the duties of her position as a burgled householder with elation. Tom's main point was to assure her that her bond was so certain to be recovered that the only thing she had to do was to take his check to Mr. Thumb and pay for the Lady of Shalott, who, Tom admitted, was as good a horse as he could have bought him-

self. In fact, Tom said that the Lady was worth more than she cost; which was a gratification that nobody but an unprotected woman horse-hunter could feel to the full. Tom assured Corona that her registration would bring back her bond if her robber did n't, and made out his check to Mr. Thumb's order with that masculine force of will which makes it either necessary or impossible for a woman to yield a point. Corona's hesitation was put by in a burly sort of way, as if it were a thing of no more consequence than a crochet-needle; and before she knew exactly what had happened, or why it happened so, the Lady of Shalott became her own. Tom managed so well in this matter that it was months after, before it occurred to Corona to wonder whether any doubt as to the ultimate recovery of the property had ever visited his mind.

Tom also assured her that she ought to print some circulars. He told her he should print a thousand if he were she. Everybody told her to print circulars; and, as she fol-

lowed all the advice she received at that time, she was fast flooding the land with circulars. But Tom said they did n't cost much. Corona pictured the peddler as hiding behind hay-stacks and other points of rural scenery to read the circulars.

Tom also advised her immediately to put the thing in the hands of the State's District Police; he observed that the local police might do very well by local affairs; and gave vent to the daring inquiry: How did we know it was a peddler? Tom added that if anything more occurred to him he would telegraph. The most adorable thing about Tom was that he had never once laughed at her for not locking the drawer above the drawer that held the bond. Corona could have worshiped him. She kissed him twice and a half, when she drove him up to the moving train, on the last platform of whose last car he leaped like a leopard in cheviot and a Derby, to return to Canada.

When Corona and the Lady of Shalott came back from the station, Corona found

five strange men sitting in the Old Maid's Paradise. The first one said he was a reporter for the Boston Sunday "Solar System," and would be obliged to her for some facts about the burglary.

Corona excused herself from the other four gentlemen, and took the Boston Sunday "Solar System" into the dining-room, and received him with that abject helplessness characteristic of the hitherto uninterviewed American citizen.

The next gentleman said he was on the staff of the Tewksbury "Daily Wild Fire," and he had called for a few details of what he considered the most blood-curdling robbery of the day. The third visitor represented the New York "Billy;" and the fourth said he did the religious column in a denominational weekly; the fifth hoped she would consider him unobtrusive, but he had called for material for her biography, which would appear in to-morrow morning's issue of the Texas "Trapper." Corona's natural and acquired civility served her very well

through the struggle with the Boston "Solar System;" but the supply sank as she ran the blockade of the others; and by the time she had come down to the Texan, she had relapsed into a condition of aboriginal combativeness. The results, as she afterward learned, were closely proportional.

The Boston Sunday "Solar System" told a thrilling tale of midnight horror, headed: "A YOUNG LADY DISPERSES A GANG OF BURGLARS," in which she figured as beautiful, rich, brave, and twenty. The Tewksbury "Wild Fire" said she was tanned. The New York "Billy" said the lady's courage in the affair had been overrated. The denominational weekly said she was heterodox. But the Texas "Trapper" reported her as fifty-seven years of age, and said she wore no bangs.

Corona's next step led her to the Headquarters of the State Police in search of her property. She had a telegram from Tom the morning she went, dated from Toronto, and running: —

“DEAR SIS, — Wish I could do the whole job for you.”

Corona telegraphed back : —

“DEAR BOY, — Have my hand in, and rather like it.”

The Police Inspectors of her native State received the lady courteously. She had never visited such a place before, and found herself a little excited by the abnormal nature of her errand. The Inspectors did not seem excited at all. They received the whole affair with a calm amounting almost to what she felt resembled a lack of emotion upon the subject of her loss.

There was an air of broad unconcern about the State Headquarters, the atmosphere of people so *blasé* in burglary that Corona felt a little mortified at never having had a burglary before.

“I have come,” she said, humbly, “to put the matter in your hands.”

“Oh, certainly,” replied the Inspector. “We will take charge of your interests.”

“It is a small sum,” pleaded Corona, “but large to me, you know.”

“Oh, certainly,” observed the Inspector. “Naturally. Quite so.”

The Inspector leaned back in his chair and drummed upon the table with his finger tips ; he played the long-forgotten national air which concerned itself with the proposal to hang a very gentlemanly sub-patriot to a sour apple-tree.

“Can’t you send a man down there to inspect the premises?” asked Corona, when she had told the story in detail. “I understand the State is expected to look after these things.”

“Of course,” replied the officer, loftily. “The State will protect.”

He gave this in the tone of a devout man who says, The Lord will provide.

“The local police is energetic,” faltered the lady, “and he keeps thinking he has a clew.”

The Inspector allowed himself a cosmopolitan smile ; his rather slender, unused fingers ceased to consign the sub-patriot to the sour apple-tree.

“But I don’t feel satisfied,” continued Corona, “to rest on that. I must depend upon the State to do all that is possible for the recovery of my property.”

“To be sure,” said the Inspector, dreamily. “I see. Of course. I should think the State would. I would if I was the State. I — would you excuse me, Madam — I’m worn out to-day. We had a murder at the South End last night, and I was up quite late. We did n’t find the murderer — in that case; but we found a clew. But it kept me pretty busy for a few hours, and — would you excuse me if I took a nap?”

“Oh, certainly,” said Corona. “Pray do. You must be tired.”

So the Inspector leaned back in his chair, and took a little nap; and Corona sat and watched him.

When the Inspector woke up he seemed quite brisk. He began: —

“Now, Madam, I will take the points in this case. Give them slowly, so I can get them all into my head.”

So Corona gave the points, as well as she could, and as slowly.

"Your local police is on the wrong trail," said the Inspector, frowning, when she had finished. "The peddler had nothing to do with it."

"Is it possible?" cried Corona. "But the dog" —

"The dog was drunk," said the Inspector. "The clew is in an entirely different direction. Give me the full address of the deaf boy who is in your employ."

"Zero? Mr. Inspector, that is impossible!"

"All things are possible to the Power of the State," answered the Inspector, with majesty. "I refer to the boy who asked how much money you kept in the house."

"But you might as well refer to my guests or my cook, in such a connection, as to that poor little deaf, honest, stupid" —

"It is not impossible that I might have to refer to your guests or your cook," returned the Inspector. "Worse things have been.

A clew must be followed wherever it leads, Madam, like life or death. I am satisfied I have a clew. I will arrest the boy to-night."

"You will do nothing of the kind!" cried Corona. "I decline to prosecute. I decline to have anything to do with it. I prefer to lose my money to outraging my neighbors by a course so devoid of the first principles of common intelligence."

"Oh! if you take it in that way," protested the Inspector, "I really must have another nap. This is quite exhausting."

So the Inspector took another nap. When he awoke he said he felt better. Corona said she was glad to hear it.

"I have it!" cried the Inspector suddenly, with an expression almost amounting to animation upon his peaceful countenance. "You should print some circulars! That will certainly recover your bond. We will try to assist you, of course, but your main dependence is on your circulars."

Corona urged that she had already printed circulars; five hundred circulars to gratify

Mr. Pushett ; one thousand circulars at the advice of her brother.

“*We* advise you to print fifteen hundred circulars,” said the Inspector. “They will not cost you anything to speak of. What reward have you offered ?”

Corona hesitatingly replied that she had offered two hundred dollars reward.

“Make it three,” said the Inspector.

“The loss is only five,” suggested Corona. But she made it three.

“When do you think I shall hear from my bond ?” asked Corona, after a pause, in which the Inspector gave so many symptoms of going to sleep again that she felt obliged, however reluctantly, to bring her personal interests once more to the notice of the State. The Inspector roused himself and said : —

“I beg your pardon ?”

Corona repeated her inquiry, and the Inspector said it was a very natural inquiry ; he said he wished it were in his power to answer it ; he said they would certainly remember the ease ; he said, again, that the State

would protect. He went so far as to intimate that this was what the State was *for*. This encouraged Corona so much that she bade him good afternoon; she could not think of anything more to say, unless she asked him once again whether he didn't think he could send a man down to examine the premises and the region where the robbery was committed; but he said No, he didn't think he could; and then she wished the Inspector pleasant dreams, and he thanked her, and said he usually had 'em; and then she came away.

After Corona had thus thrown herself upon the protection of the State, she remembered that Tom had advised her to visit the office of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. Accordingly she did so, stating her errand as inoffensively as possible. The Fee-Fi-Fum was a very imposing railroad. There was a great deal of marble in its office. There was a great deal more of majesty in its clerks. Over marble and majesty Corona pushed her errand, into the presence of the Thirteenth

Assistant Vice-President, a gentlemanly young man, who said he was sorry for her. Corona thanked him, but said that she had come to see about the duplication of her bond, which, being registered, she had understood was absolutely protected against fire, burglary, and loss. The young man replied that, in a sense, this was true ; in a sense, not. Corona begged to inquire in which sense it was not true.

“ We do not duplicate,” returned the gentlemanly young man. “ We never duplicate. Our lawyer objects.”

“ How, then, asked the bondholder, am I to get my money ? ”

“ In a *sense*,” replied the young man, politely, “ you *don't* get your money. Our lawyer is very strict about it.”

“ Who does get it, if I don't ? ” asked the lady, patiently. “ The Railroad ? ”

“ Oh, dear, no ! ” cried the young man. “ Of course not. I can't tell you exactly who gets it. Our lawyer has never explained to us.”

“ But the burglar cannot get it, can he ? ” asked Corona.

“ Certainly not,” returned the Thirteenth Assistant Vice-President, brightening. “ The burglar cannot get it. It will never be of any use to the burglar. That is the advantage of registration.”

“ But I was told, when I bought my bond,” urged Corona, “ that registration would protect.”

“ I presume you were,” said the young man, courteously. “ That seems to be the prevailing impression.”

“ And, of course, you understand,” he added, “ that we will pay you your interest ; it is only your principal which you do not recover.”

“ That is something, at least.” The bondholder brightened.

“ But you must first sign a little paper, you know. We call it a bond of indemnity ; just a little matter of form. I will show you a copy. Here ! We require you to sign this before we can pay you anything. Our lawyer is very particular about it.”

Corona read the bond of indemnity over carefully, once — twice. She laid it down and rose to go. All the marble and majesty had passed over now from the office of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. to the face of the bondholder.

“This paper,” said the bondholder, “requires me to expect nothing in case of forgery” —

“Certainly not. Our lawyer” —

“In case of forgery by the lifting of figures; by the erasion of names with the use of chemicals; in case, I observe, of your own inadvertence in paying my property over to the wrong party” —

“Of course, madam. We could not be expected to guard you against our own inadvertence. That would be asking a great deal.”

“This paper also requires,” continued Corona, “that I shall protect you in a law-suit, if any such be brought against you, by an innocent and victimized purchaser of the bond. It requires me to subject myself, for

the value of a \$500 bond, to indefinite pecuniary risks — call it \$5,000, say — some pleasant morning? Do I understand it correctly?”

“In a sense,” said the officer of the Fee-Fi-Fum, “you may be said to understand it. It is a simple matter, you see. You sign the paper. We pay you your \$93 interest, and ” —

“I do not sign the paper,” said Corona, laying it down quietly. The officer of the Fee-Fi-Fum looked surprised, even grieved.

“You will excuse me,” repeated the lady, “from signing your paper. May I ask, before I bid you good-morning, in what you consider that the value of registration *does* consist?”

“Why, I *told* you,” urged the Thirteenth Assistant Vice-President. “It renders the property useless to the burglar.”

“And protects the Railroad?” asked Corona.

“Certainly, madam. And protects the Railroad.”

“Thank you,” said Corona. “I understand now. Those are the main points in which registration is of interest to the bondholder?”

“I believe,” said the Thirteenth Assistant Vice-President, “those are the main points.”

On her way to the station, Corona dropped in at Messrs. Jump & Jiggles', and mentioned the substance of her interview in the office of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. The brokers were quite interested in the matter. Mr. Jump said the Fee-Fi-Fum had the sharpest lawyer in New England. Both Mr. Jump and Mr. Jiggles told the bondholder that she had done just right. Mr. Jiggles went so far as to say that he would see his money at — Behring's Strait before he would sign that sort of a bond of indemnity. But Mr. Jiggles was the nervous member of the firm.

IX.

MESSRS. HIDE AND SEEK.

THE summer was wearing on. But that Registered Bond No. 30,075 had not been restored to Paradise. Freshets of circulars poured over the land. The reward was gradually increased at about the rate of a dollar a day. Tom telegraphed exorbitantly from different points upon the map of North America. Mr. Pushett called at the cottage, with a new clew, from twice to three times a week. Messrs. Jump & Jiggles sent a copy of some advertisements once used by them in tracking down a heavy theft from their private safe; but stated that, in that case, the money was never recovered. The Fee-Fi-Fum wrote to Corona that their lawyer would be happy to explain to her that bond of indemnity. From the headquarters of the State Force nothing was received but a bill for printing circulars.

It was in August that Tom telegraphed, one pleasant evening, the two words, "*Private Detective.*"

While Corona sat turning this message over in her hand and in her mind, another, with winged heels, flew fast upon it. The second said : —

"*But be careful about confounding felony.*"

"I don't see exactly what he means," said Corona to Susy ; for Susy was visiting her just then with the baby."

"I *always* know what he means," said Susy. "Let *me* see the telegram. 'Confounding felony. Confounding felony.' What is 'confounding felony'?"

"It must be a mistake," said Corona.

"Oh, no," said Susy. "Tom never makes mistakes."

"It's that telegram company made the mistake," observed Puelvir. "I never did think much of a concern that would steal the name of the Woman's Christian Union outright that way."

“Whoever made the mistake,” said Corona, “I think Tom must have meant ‘compounding.’ I think I’ve heard the expression. I’m not clear what it means. I must ask Mr. Pushett.”

But Susy shook her head. She persisted that confound was the natural and proper word in that connection. She thought it might have been confounded — ‘confounded felony’; from what she knew of Tom’s habits of speech, she thought this quite possible. Susy was very positive. She usually was. And then the baby cried, — the baby generally did cry, — and Susy said she wanted Corona to take her to ride. Susy did not say, but thought, that it was very inhospitable in Corona that the Lady of Shalott had broken her saddle-girth and that Zero had gone over to the city to get it mended. Susy did say that horse was always breaking something and being mended; and Corona replied that this was quite true. Susy was having a delightful visit at the Old Maid’s Paradise; but you never would have thought it.

The next morning Corona took her sister-in-law and her niece upon a drive; and as nothing broke but a buckle in the bridle, and as the Lady did not cast a shoe, and did not happen to get a great many stones into her feet, and was not too warm, so that Corona felt at liberty to let her go, and was not too cold, so it was not necessary to blanket her, they had a charming drive, and returned in excellent spirits. Corona was just waiting to give the Lady of Shalott her piece of maple sugar, and to remind Zero to look for rocks in her feet, and be sure and wash her ankles, and put on her duster, and hang up the harness, and not give her anything for half an hour, and not to forget to wet the oats, and to remember the hay, and not to take anybody else's pail, and to look after the bedding, and to give her all the water she wanted, and to shut the barn window where the draught was, and dust the cushions, and wash the wheels, and shake the mat, and dry the sponges, and put the chamois in the sun, and pull the buggy in out of it, and shut the barn

door, and come again at four o'clock — as Corona was thus struggling with her daily duties as a lone woman who boarded a horse in Fairharbor, Puelvir came out to tell her that there was another man in the parlor, and she thought he was a widower or a book-agent ; she could n't tell which.

But when Corona went into the house, she found that he was a New York detective. He introduced himself as representing the famous firm of Hide & Seek, private detectives. He admitted that he was Mr. Seek. He usually sent a man ; but this case he considered a little out of the ordinary run. Her brother, he said, had sent him ; he had requested them to lose no time in giving her at least the opportunity to put her affairs into their hands. Mr. Seek had seen her brother for ten minutes as he was passing through on his way to somewhere. He produced a line of introduction from Tom in proof of these assertions, and Corona begged him to be seated. Mr. Seek added that they had ten dollars a day and expenses. As nearly as he could make out, he

should expect to recover her bond in about five days after he once got at it. After a little preliminary firing, Corona confided to Mr. Seek that the State did not protect her, that the Fee-Fi-Fum charged their law-suits and their inadvertence to her, and that Mr. Pushett woke her up nights. In short, she said, she was now ready to do what she should have done the day the robbery was committed, — to put herself unreservedly in the hands of honorable private detectives, who could insure the return of her property for any pecuniary consideration which the interest at stake might justify her in paying.

So Mr. Seek took out his note-book and pencil, as Mr. Pushett had done ; and he, in his turn, called for the points of the case. Corona was delighted with the exquisite agility which marked the detective's movements. They were in highly-organized contrast to the crude energy of the local force or the sedative benediction of State protection. The professional detective had the "go" of a man who charged by the comma, and to whom every

interrogation point meant money. He said it would be necessary to ask a few questions, and he proceeded something in the following manner, after begging the lady's pardon for his precision of detail : —

“ Your name, if you please ? Maiden name ? Where do you reside in the winter ? Parents living ? Their name ? Name of Paternal Grandfather ? Maternal Grandmother ? *Her* maiden name ? Any consumption in your family ? Insanity ? Epilepsy ? Are you a Homœopathist ? As a family, do you have severe colds ? Any of your folks ever in prison ? Ever hung for anything ? Are you quick-tempered ? How old are you ? Where were you born ? Did you ever have red hair ? False teeth ? What is your height, if you please ? Blue eyes ? Have you any occupation ? Do you drink coffee ? Is it your intention to marry ? How much are you worth ? ”

When the detective had put these questions, with others of an equally comprehensive nature, he requested to see the servants of the

family. Zero was first brought upon the scene. The detective took the boy in with one piercing professional glance, then made a perfectly unconscious and rather interesting gesture with the lead pencil, as if he canceled that entry in the topic. He gave, however, a few passing inquiries: —

“Well, Zero, how long have you been in the service of this lady?”

“Hey?”

“How *long* have you worked for this *lady*?”

“Lady? The horse’s name’s the Lady. She calls her the Lady that Sold Out. I take care of her. She’s a good horse.”

“Are you deaf?”

“Eh?”

“*Deaf*. Are you *DEAF*?”

“No, I ain’t deaf. I’m a little hard o’ hearin’.”

“Who was the person who asked you how much money your employer kept” —

“Hi?”

“*Who* was the *person*?” etc., etc.

"He warn't a person. He was a boy."

"What was his name?"

"Hey? Dunno. Never see him afore. Never see him sence. He was a kind of long boy. He don't belong in these parts. What? I did n't sense what you said. Hey?"

"Where were you on the night of the robbery?"

"Me? I was to home, sleepin' along of my little brother."

"How did you spend the previous evening?"

"Marm give me a Sunday-school lesson to learn to my sister. I helped along of the dishes first, and chopped the kindlin'."

"Are you aware that you might have been the subject of suspicion in this business?"

"Hey?"

"*Suspicion.* Do you know you might" —

"Fishin? No, I ain't fishin these days. I take care of her and her horse."

At this point the detective said that would do, and requested to see the female domestic. Puelvir came. She had her crimps on, and a

fresh dress. She stood with her hands upon her hips. She and the detective eyed each other. The detective smiled slightly. But Puelvir did not smile.

“Here I be!” she began. “What do you want of me?”

“Your name, if agreeable to you.”

“It’s a very agreeable name to me. I was christened Puella Virginia of a Christmas Sunday in the Baptist meetin-house. Nor I’ve never seen any reason to change it, nuther.”

“Your age?”

“Be you the census-taker?”

“I am anything that serves my purposes in this business.”

“The last one asked me how many children there was in this house. I shut the door in his face, and sent him about his business. That one you hear cryin’ upstairs belongs to her sister-in-law. It don’t reside here, thanks to mercy.”

“You have forgotten to tell me how old you are.”

“Just fifteen come Janooary,” said Puelvir, grimly.

“How long do you purpose to remain in the service of this lady?”

“Long as she ’ll have me.”

“Are you attached to her service?”

“I refused two for her in a year and six months.”

“Two what?”

“Two widderers. (Never you mind, Miss Corona; I don’t count the raspberry man neither.”)

“That peddler — he was an old acquaintance of yours, I believe; was n’t he? Was he an agreeable gentleman?”

“What are you up to?” said Puelvir, sharply.

“He said some polite things, perhaps, to you. I should think he might. I was merely inquiring” —

“Men folks are most generally polite to me. They hev to be.”

“Especially in this case, when it was an old friend, I think you said. Somebody whose

acquaintance you formed last winter? Wanted to marry you, I dare say, if you had returned his sentiments?"

"Look a here!" said Puelvir, slowly, in a voice of concentrated passion; all her gaunt, faithful face seemed to draw back and square off at the detective: "Do you mean — do you *darst* to mean to — to come here with the drippin's of a notion in the bottom of your miser'ble sneakin' Noo York City soul, that me and her burglars was on terms? Do you darst to figger it as I move in any sech circle of society? Do you darst to suppose — Lord have mercy on his soul!" cried Puelvir, turning to her mistress with a motion and expression which were so noble that they could not fail of being beautiful. "What do you suppose the poor critter *does* darst to suppose? Me — *me*, Miss Corona, — and I've been that fond of you. Well, there! Let the creetur go. He ain't wuth a tear, not even where salt's so plenty as it is along shore. I won't cry for him; you don't catch me. You — poor — creetur," added Puelvir,

gently: "You 're wuss than a census-taker. You may go. I have n't nothin' more to say to you. You may go. I've got some sass to season. You'll have to excuse me, sir. Good-mornin'."

When the detective had finished his conversations with Corona and Zero and Puelvir, and had examined the premises carefully, and had interviewed the expressman and Mr. Pushett, he expressed himself as perfectly satisfied with his morning's work. He said it was as clear a case as he ever had in his life. He said all he wanted now was four days. He expected to be able to put his finger on the bond in four days. It was a beautiful case, he said. The servants were not implicated; he had never thought the servants were implicated. This was the work of a professional cracksman. What was more, Mr. Seek added, with a certain pride in his tone, it was the work of *New York* cracksmen. It was too neat to be done anywhere else. They talk about the culture of Boston! It was all very well; but when you came to a thing of this

kind, it could n't be compassed outside of New York. It was the most beautiful piece of work he had seen for some time. There was a dexterity, a dare, a reticence about the job, which, professionally speaking, excited Mr. Seek's admiration. He worked himself into such a glow upon the subject that Corona quite shared his enthusiasm. She began to feel it something of an honor to have been burgled by such highly-developed cracksmen; and when Mr. Seek assured her that he knew the fellow past all question, her excitement waxed rapidly.

"Beyond all doubt," said Mr. Seek, as he rose to take his adieus, "the man who robbed your house is Marcus Aurelius Bobbin — a notorious cracksmen; belongs to the second story gang; he's an expert; I know him well. Been in Sing-Sing three times, for forgery, and other little matters. There is n't a deeper fellow in the country; his skill is really something uncommon. If he is n't drunk, I can put my finger on him to-morrow evening. If he is n't here, he will be

there or there. I know every saloon he visits; every pal in his gang; every indictment that is hanging over his head. There are four against him already. Your bond is in the hands of his fence. I know his fence. Or it is at his pawnbroker's. I know his pawnbroker very well. I'd raise the reward a few dollars, if I was you. Perhaps I'd print a few more circulars. I'd make it up to two thousand. Give me a few hundred to scatter as I go along. In case of any hitch it would be a good thing. But I am certain of my clew. I am confident Marcus Aurelius will come to terms. In point of fact, I presume he is only waiting to hear from me. He counts upon your taking — any honorable steps. You may expect to see your bond within six days. I shall telegraph you as soon as I see my man. It is a remarkably neat case. I will keep you informed. You will probably hear from me to-morrow night."

But Corona did not hear from the New York detective to-morrow night, nor the next night, nor the next. It lacked a little of a

week from the day of his visit at Paradise, when a letter was received from Mr. Seek, which ran : —

“ OFFICE OF HIDE, SEEK & Co.,
NEW YORK CITY.

“ DEAR MADAM, — Marcus Aurelius Bobbin is committed for murder in the second degree. As it seems he was in prison at the date of the robbery, we find him able to prove an *alibi*. We have now a better clew than that. Have no doubt whatever that we are on the right scent this time. Please send by check, to order, forty dollars more by return mail. It will be needed immediately.

Yours, etc., HIDE, SEEK & Co.”

Days passed. Nights fled. The moon waned. At intervals Corona heard from Messrs. Hide & Seek. Usually it was by telegraph ; collect dispatches. They were always cheerful dispatches. Sometimes they said : —

“ *Must have fifty dollars to-morrow. New clew.*”

Maddening messages like these dashed

upon her, inevitably in the evening after the last train had gone : —

“ Come to New York, or send agent. Must consult with you.”

Or, without a moment's warning, she found herself plunged into an abyss like this : —

“ Send seventy-five dollars by telegraph. Pawnbroker hedges. All goes well.”

Ou vont les vieilles lunes ? Where go the old clews ? Corona went so far as to wonder sometimes ; but she never went any further. Nothing went any further, except her check-book. She used up one and began another in the ardent service of Messrs. Hide & Seek. But neither Messrs. Hide & Seek, nor the Protecting State, nor Mr. Pushett, nor time, nor the burglars, nor the check-book, restored to Paradise that Registered Bond of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U.

X.

JUDAS JOHNS.

AND still the summer fled. The nasturtiums in the dory burst into a blaze outside the cottage windows; the ardent flowers leaped up the little masts and caught each other across the ropes of twine, and flung to the light winds a sheet of gold. Where once the old gray sail had perilously tossed the weather-daring boat across the bar (for, to put a sail on a dory, it is well known, is to take one's life in one's hands) the yellow flowers turned their burning faces to look into sheltered windows, or leaned to neighbors' children lifting up, or played tricks with the restless horse, when she stood waiting too long for her driver, on the white-hot mornings. The helpless boat had lost her air of tugging at her anchor to get away;

she had settled to her lot, like gentle old age to its fireside corner; the storms had broken and were past; the tide was stemmed, and had set in. Here was the last haven—for the wave and the wind, the grass-blade and the seed; for the surf and the thunder, the flowering of little thoughts and cares; for action and passion and courage, patience and waiting and peace. The dory accepted its fate like a lovable old man.

The summer fled; too fast for the busy feet that now would never overtake her; too fast for the heart distraught with cares she would have none of. If Marcus Aurelius Bobbin pined in prison, if Messrs. Hide & Seek pranced after all the clews in New York society, what is that (said summer in Fair-harbor), what is that to me or thee?

But never to the threshold of Paradise returned—nay, not by so much as a registered coupon—that registered bond No. 30,075, Fe-Fi-Fum and I. O. U.

It was a warm afternoon in late August when the event which it is the duty of this

chapter to record took place. It took place, like most of the others, in the gray parlor, which was fast assuming to Corona's wearied imagination the character of a penitentiary or police-station; she felt as if it would need some immense moral or mental cologne-sprinkler to deodorize from her gentle home the odic forces which had invisibly wandered thither with the magnetism of the strange visitants whom misfortune had imposed upon her. She continued, at stray moments, to think of what Mary said about her lonely situation.

It was more lonely than usual just now. Mary was traveling with her husband. Tom had taken Susy and the baby to the Yellowstone on what he called a little trip. Elf was at Bar Harbor. All of the girls were going somewhere, or busy somehow; it was one of the interludes when there was nobody in particular to visit Paradise. Puelvir alone stayed by her; Puelvir and the summer boarders, Matthew Launceelot and the Lady of Shalott and Zero — and the ocean. After

all, how many ! Corona counted them on her fingers, and took heart easily ; she always did.

On this hot afternoon of which I speak, she was sitting quite by herself in a cool Wakefield chair, in the draught between the open door and windows. The blinds were closed, and the light in the room was dim. It was so dim that, when a shadow fell across it, she did not at first observe that some one had entered the room, and was standing, staring about. Immediately, however, she saw, started, and sprang to her feet. This was like no guest who had ever been seen in Paradise ; *this* was quite another thing.

When she sprang, the man sprang too ; instinctively put his hand upon what may have been his pistol-belt — dropped it, and recovered himself.

“ I ’ll — I ’ll not harm you,” he said.
“ I ’ve come on business.”

“ I will listen to your business,” said Corona, quietly.

He was a pitiable looking man ; not very

large, nor very strong-looking, nor very young. Hidden deeds had carved ugly lines in his weak face ; evil years had lighted fires in his narrow eyes that smouldered with the unconscious self-betrayal of vice ; he stooped, and he had a cough, and his hands shook like those of a person who had palsy hanging about him. He was not very well clad, and looked as if he might have been a drinking man. Take him all in all, he was not a pleasant looking person.

After that first throb, Corona's heart beat evenly ; she did not feel afraid of him somehow ; fear was not the word. Her emotions pulsed from indignation to pity like the pendulum of a delicate clock.

"Sit down," she said, "and explain your errand. (Come here, Matthew Launeelot !) I will hold the dog. (Be still, Matthew ! Do not touch this person. I will take care of myself. When I want *you*, I will tell you. Sit still, sir.")

"He seems to be a spirited dog," objected the stranger, discontentedly. "Those tan

terriers are considered the best watch-dogs in the world by — those that have reason to know, I believe. You'll explain to him, may be, that I don't mean any harm to anybody."

"Yes," said the lady. "I will explain it."

"I didn't know I'd got a woman to deal with," began the stranger, with embarrassment. "There was nothing but initials to the advertisement. Where's your husband?"

"He is not here just now," replied Corona.

"Father?"

"No."

"Brother? No man you could put hands on? I'd rather deal with a man."

"Whoever has errands at this house must deal with me."

"I suppose" — the visitor hesitated — "I suppose you know what I've come for?"

"What *have* you come for?"

"It's about — I come on business about your bond. I saw your advertisement and

two of your circulars. You offered a reward for the recovery of the bond."

"I did."

"Mean to pay it?"

"Certainly. When the bond is restored to me I shall pay whatever I have offered to the restorer."

"Take your Bible oath to it?"

"A lady's word is as good as her oath."

"Is it?" asked the fellow, with what seemed like a touch of reality in his tone. "I don't know much about ladies."

"I know where your property is," ventured the guest, after an awkward silence. "I could get it returned to you."

"Did you steal it?" asked Corona, quietly.

"Are you the thief?"

"So help me God! No!"

"I wonder if you do expect God to help you?" she asked, with a kind of distant intellectual curiosity.

"Ma'am?"

"Never mind. It seems 'to me that I should need some other proof that you are

not the thief, besides the very natural religious feeling of dependence upon the Almighty which you express."

"Do you think I'd be such a dummed fool as to come here if I was?"

This was the outcry of Nature, and Corona bowed to the argument.

"I suppose," she said, "you are what is called a 'fence?' Is that it?"

"Never you mind," said her visitor, surly, "what I am. You advertise for your lost property. You offer a reward. I see your advertisement. I offer to return your property. That is all that concerns you in the business, anyhow."

"It might be, and might not be," returned Corona. "I am not used to such business. If I can recover my property honorably, I shall be glad to do it. If I can't, I shall let it go. Money is not the only thing to be considered in such a question."

"Ma'am?" said the stranger again.

"You ain't rich, are you?" he observed, after looking about the little room. His eyes

wandered over the books and pictures with dull interest, fell on the cotton-flannel upholstery, and returned to the floor; where they sank, it seemed from force of habit, like something weighted, to drown in deep water.

“No, I am not rich. I sometimes wonder how a man must feel — to rob a woman.”

“A cracksman is a busy man,” observed the caller. “People of their profession have so many different interests, you know. They’re polite men, too. It’s seldom they hurt a lady if it comes to the worst; they’ll go out of their way rather than to shoot a lady. But about this bond. If you will let me go home and consult with a friend of mine — I’m out of money; I wonder if you could lend me enough to get to New York? No? Oh! well, it’s of no consequence, and then, if you will advertise in the New York ‘Corkscrew,’ and name the day and place, and come on yourself, and say, ‘So help you God, you’ll act in good faith,’ and not mention the matter to anybody, and bring the cash with you for the sum you offer, I —

think — I know a man who is acquainted with a fellow — who will on that occasion restore your bond.”

“What is your name?” asked this unprotected woman at this juncture.

“You may call me what you please,” said the “fence,” looking heavily into his hat.

“Suppose I call you — Judas Johns?”

“That will do as well as any name for me,” returned the man. “I don’t know as I — have you a strong preference for the *first* name you mention?”

“It occurred to me at the moment; that is all,” said the lady.

“My conditions are very simple,” pleaded the “fence,” lifting his narrow eyes to her serious, pale face. “It’s a registered bond and no mortal use to ’em except they get the reward. I don’t think you’ll have any trouble. You just do as I tell you, and advertise, and come on. You’d be met at any safe and respectable place you name, and no harm could come to you.”

“Why don’t you come to me with my property?” asked the bondholder.

“Lord !” cried the man, looking up. “I wouldn’t put myself in this position again for the worth of the whole bond. Folks stared at me at your depot here. Your police follered me. You ’d have thought something ailed me.”

“I don’t know that I wonder,” remarked Corona, looking the poor wretch over.

“I don’t know how I ’m going to get out of it, either,” querulously. “You’re on a branch, and I’ve got to get back the way I come. You don’t catch me in this blarsted town again, if I can see my way out of it. Say. You won’t make trouble for me, will you? I come in good faith. You’ll treat me in good faith, won’t you?”

“Mr. Judas Johns,” said Corona, in a low voice, “you had better take the next train, and go. I have nothing more to say to you.”

“You don’t mean it?” cried Judas Johns. “Why, I could restore your property in a week !”

“When my property is restored to me, I

shall receive it," said Corona, who had, be it confessed, the vaguest idea whether she were behaving like a heroine or a fool ; she had nothing but blind instinct to guide her ; and instinct said : " Stop here."

" I don't know what compounding felony is," she added, " and very likely I should n't know a felon if I saw him. But I prefer not to pursue the matter, Mr. Judas Johns, in the way you propose. The train leaves at half-past five. It will take you an hour to get over there."

" You ain't going to play any dodge on me, are you ? " asked Judas Johns, turning ghastly white.

" I could n't if I wanted to. The police are three miles away, and I have no telephone. You could hide in the woods over yonder a week, and nobody find you. No, I do not think it my duty to trouble you any further than to ask you to bring our interview to an end."

" I ain't the burglar, you know," urged Judas Johns. " My business never has run in

that line." He rose to go, glancing uneasily about.

"I understand," said Corona. Do what she might, pity half slew indignation in her soul, as she looked solemnly at the weak and cringing figure that crawled away from her. Judas Johns shook now, but not with palsy; and staggered, but not from drink. He was the picture of fear.

"I've had a fit of sickness," he said. "I ain't very strong. I wish I was — in New York. I have n't enjoyed my visit to this town. It's a Godforsaken country."

As Judas Johns halted on the steps of the cottage to look up and down the street with his long, furtive, anxious look, curiosity overcame stateliness in Corona, for that last moment's chance, and she asked: —

"Do you suppose, Mr. Johns, from your — general — acquaintance with the world — have you any idea that the men who stole my bond were the same that stole a paper of tacks and a hatchet and so on in the neighborhood, early in June?"

"What do you take 'em for?" cried Mr. Judas Johns.

"Then it was n't the same gang?"

"*Your* job was done by the most accomplished cracksman in the United States. Why, he never *touches* anything below \$500!"

"Was it the peddler?" asked Corona, breathlessly. But Mr. Johns made no reply. He put his hat on, jammed it well over his eyes, and moved away.

"And those clews — all those clews?" ventured Corona. "The local police, and the State police, and the private detective — they all have clews, you know. Are none of them" — She stopped.

Mr. Judas Johns regarded her as straight as a man with eyes so crooked could regard a lady who had shown some sense in a trying position. A stray smile crept across his unholy features, the first and only one which she had seen.

"You've treated me like a — like a — lady," he said slowly. "I would n't spend any more money if I was you."

“You’re sure you could n’t advance me passage-money to New York, are you?” he added, turning round when he had gone as far as the clothes-post.

“Quite sure. But I will give you an omnibus ticket — a Fairharbor omnibus ticket to the station, if you would like it.”

Mr. Johns replied that he should like it very much, and Corona gave him an omnibus ticket.

Matthew Launcelot up to this time had remained unsubmitive, but a fixture in his mistress’s arms. At intervals he had interrupted her conversation with Mr. Judas Johns by anguished growls and yawns of thwarted ferocity ; now and then he struggled like the moral law in the grasp of the Devil and all his angels, in Corona’s tender clutch. As the visitor turned to go, and when he was well past the doryful of nasturtiums, and down the road, and through the gate, the dog gave one unearthly yell, and, seeming to shriek his soul and body out of Corona’s arms sprang from them, and off like a cannon-ball after Mr. Judas Johns.

“Matthew ! Matthew Launcelot ! Come back ! Come here this minute, sir ! Oh ! Puelvir, stop that dog ! Matthew *Launcelot* ! Oh, I would n’t have had this happen ! *Matthew* ! PUELVR !”

“Have mercy upon ye !” cried Puelvir, running wildly about. “It’s the burglar !”

“It’s not the burglar, Puelvir ! Stop the dog ! Matthew Launcelot ! *Don’t you touch that man !*”

“If it ain’t t burglar, it’s his first cousin on the mother’s side !” rebelled Puelvir. “Don’t you ask me to stop the dog for you, Miss Corona !”

The dog had leaped as far as the gate and stood bristling ; at his mistress’s voice he turned his angry head ; Mr. Judas Johns, too terrified to hurry, gave one beseeching glance at Corona and stood still. The dog he could kick into the Harbor ; but against the scene he was powerless. The people on the beach began to collect in groups and look idly up the street. All the consequences forced themselves through Corona’s imagination in an instant’s diameter.

“Matthew Launcelot, come *here*,” she said, in a terrible voice. The terrier looked at her — at Mr. Judas Johns — and at her again. All the while he was barking thunderously. It was a duel between the dog and the mistress.

“Matthew Launcelot, you have no business to touch that person ! Come *here*, sir !”

Matthew walked deliberately through the gate, up the street a little way.

“Let him alone, sir ! Come here, sir. Come here to *me* !”

“Would n’t, if I was him !” said Puelvir, virtuously. The dog looked back over his shoulder.

“Come here, or I’ll — I’ll have somebody else *beat* you !” called the mistress.

The dog hesitated, turned, and came slowly back ; he was trembling with baffled rage ; Corona patted him, but he did not kiss her. Outraged respectability flashed from his fiery eyes. A creature defeated in his own vocation — a conscience called off its post of duty by another conscience — Matthew Launcelot obeyed, because he was a dog.

But he howled after the retreating figure of Mr. Judas Johns, as it passed — a weak and dreary spectacle — up the street, as if the foundations of human civilization depended upon the amount of noise that could be made before the wretched man had turned the corner.

XI.

WHAT IS CALLED FRIENDSHIP.

BUT still the summer took to herself her scented wings; dipped them in the glowing waves of the Harbor as she flitted over, and lifted them dripping with the deeper colors of the harvest days. For it was September in Fairharbor; and Paradise had abandoned its search for the registered bond No. 30,075 of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U.

A full account of the visit of Mr. Judas Johns having passed from the lady to the detectives, Messrs. Hide & Seek luminously replied that if Judas Johns were not the celebrated fence, Jib Handover, he was the still more celebrated confidence man, Tib Come-over. In either case she had been dealing with a person highly accomplished in his department, and had effected a dextrous escape

or a serious mistake, as she chose to regard it, or as the event might prove. Messrs. Hide & Seek intimated that she should have telephoned to themselves before she let the fellow go ; and offered (if she would forward \$62.50 more) to put their finger on him and investigate his game. Messrs. Hide & Seek observed that now we had a clew that was worth something, and were assured that she would see her property back within thirty days. Corona replied that she hoped she should ; and that any clews which it were worth anything to anybody else to follow should have her benedictions and her prayers, but that her personal assistance must henceforth take this more spiritual form. She urged that she had now contributed as much to the support of the detective system of the country as she felt to be her quota, even from the most patriotic point of view ; the only thing lacking to the completion of the situation was that she had failed to pay Judas John's return expenses to New York. This, from an artistic aspect, might be regretted. Messrs. Hide &

Seek urged the matter a little. They went so far as to say that it was a very interesting episode, and that Judas Johns might in fact have really been in the state of health and courage which he represented. Sickness quelled those fellows easily ; and he had put himself into a neat trap if things went against him. On the other hand, if he was playing the sympathy dodge, seeing he was dealing with a lady — nothing was more likely — it would be equally interesting to settle the point.

Corona admitted that it was a very interesting point ; but added that the looming architecture of the almshouse of her native State was nearer to the leisure of her imagination at the present time. Not a five-cent nickel more should she amuse herself by engulfing in the abyss which yawned between a burgled bondholder and his property. The burglar was welcome to her \$500 Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. He might retire from business on the value of registration, live upon his income, and become an innocent member of society.

To this conclusion she had come ; and to this she held.

When she told Puelvir so, Puelvir said it was about time. She said they were nothing but so many men folks, anyway ; and land ! what could you expect ? Did anybody ever know a man to *find* anything, she 'd like to know ? If it was his boot-buttoner or his squash-hat, did n't he set till a woman hunted of it up ? It was n't in the breed, Puelvir said.

Puelvir felt as though her mistress, after a dissipated career, had returned to the bosom of the family. She petted her and made much of her, as of a prodigal in an advanced stage of penitence. They were quite by themselves in these days — the two women, with Matthew Launcelot, and the pretty horse ; for it was September in Fairharbor.

The summer guests had gone with the wild roses and the mosquitoes. Only a few saunterers remained to dot the beach with graceful outlines ; and these were they to whom the love of the sea is a passion, not a friend-

ship. In the deserted scenery "T. H. Trader, Boxes and Shooks," again became a prominent and interesting feature. The little garden-plots in front of the cottages lifted the stray blossoms which had survived the botanical fact that flowers are not called upon to grow on Cape Ann granite, and that all the beds one makes wash off and trickle down, and leave the seed and the ledge to fight it out between them. What was properly called "the garden" consisted now of one morning-glory and one bachelor's button, and these had a Septemberish look, as of a flower that was feeling bilious but would not own it. But the doryful of nasturtiums blazed bravely. The pads of the round leaves alone told the tale of the dying year; these were yellowing and paling; a few tones behind the blossom, like embroidery done in tints to match.

It was lonely in Paradise; but it was lovely in Paradise; there, as so often elsewhere, the two came near to being the same thing. Corona, after the agitations of the summer, sank

back upon the cushion of her solitude, and drew a deep breath. Puelvir came often on the little errands and deceptions of affection to see if she wanted anything, or wanted to want anything.

Matthew Launcelot jumped into her lap without the form of an invitation, and sat solid upon her portfolio or her book. If she intimated that some other location or position would assist her occupations, he kissed her. The Lady of Shalott came faithfully to the clothes-post every day ; and when she did n't have to be shod, or there was n't a nut needed in the buggy, or Zero did n't think she had a cold, and had better not go out, Corona drove down the deepening days, over and over and through the shore, the downs, the woods of Essex, and the distant beaches of the Cape ; and, as she drove, she loved every wave and pebble, and the attitude of every leaf, the countenance of each horizon : and for this, as for all loving, grew stronger and more capacious for love. She grew very fond, too, of the Lady. Who could help it ? She was

as dainty and feminine a creature as ever made her nine or ten miles an hour, and answered to the voice with a sensitiveness which made the bit seem a rudeness and the whip ruffianly. Corona would have undergone another burglary for her, if she could have afforded it. But Matthew Launcelot had never forgiven the Lady of Shalott. It was one of the exciting incidents in this solitary life — where little events have so much more artistic proportion to the prospective than larger ones do to a crowded history — to try and teach Matthew Launcelot to go to ride. This he would do only under what is delicately known in asylums as “restraint,” howling to high heaven all the time. One day his protest reached a climax that put an end to Corona’s educational efforts in that direction. As she drove, holding the dog with a firm arm, and the reins, watchful, with the fine senses of an experienced driver, in one hand — Matthew Launcelot yelping as if he were having his teeth extracted, and the Lady of Shalott, with her head down, flying at a pretty pace up the

crowded street of the little town — the dog, with one mighty effort, released himself, leaped over the dasher, and landed, shrieking murderously, directly upon the horse's back. There was one black instant, one swift struggle between horse and driver, a gathering of people, and rushing blindly to save life ; but before hand could touch bridle, the Lady had reared, stopped, shivered a little, planted her feet, looked over her shoulder, regarded the terrier with a kind of scorn, and proudly stood perfectly still till he jumped off. She disdained to run for him.

After this, reconciliation between Matthew and the Lady was considered as one of the abandoned hopes of life ; and the only antagonism in Corona's harmonious family circle remained unadjusted.

It was lovely in Paradise ; it was lonely in Paradise. In the cool mornings of the blue-and-gold weather Corona held to her fireside with Puelvir and the dog. In the yellow noons — and nothing could be better than the September noons in Fairharbor — she basked

upon the rocks and the brown, dry grass which crackled beneath her as she stirred lazily below the staggering sun umbrella to turn the page that flapped against the rising wind.

Nothing could be better than the September noons unless it were the September moons. Then there seemed to arise upon the world another flood, as of the waters that were above the waters.

In the glamour the ocean lifted itself to meet that other sea. Silent sails glided across the Harbor, like thoughts too timid to be spoken. As one looked at them from the shore, and watched them melt into the long shadow of the opposite coast, they seemed like something precious and wasted. As one looked from them into the water, the depths seemed to be sucking down pearls, tossed by the prodigal moon, one guessed not why; and lost, one knew not where.

It was on a night of this sort that the incident which I have now to relate, for history's sacred sake, took place at the Old Maid's Paradise. It was a warm night; one of the

warmest that September hoards for her lovers, and lavishes in outbursts of tenderness that the soul remembers.

Corona was in the hammock on the piazza, swinging idly there alone ; a scarlet shawl hung over her dress of thick white flannel, and was regarded with disfavor by Matthew Launcelot ; for the fringe tickled his ears. Now and then Corona patted the dog absently, with that manner which seems to say, You are better than nobody ! and which a sensitive dog will resent as well as a sensitive man. Puelvir had gone to a prayer-meeting, on the ground that she felt as if she should like to go and set somewhere and sing alto. The empty house was quite dark ; and Corona's figure in the white foreground seemed to absorb a disproportionate amount of light. She lay so still that she looked as if she were carved there — a statue of Solitude, content and sweet.

When footsteps hit the crisp grass and touched the lower step, she stirred, but did not start.

When a face — unseen for God knew how long! — flashed full before her in the great breadth and extent of light, she did not cry out nor spring. To a depth below all that — to such a depth as astonishment might strike in the world that comes after this — she was let down, down, down; and then her soul stood still.

“*You!*” she said. “*You?*” And that was all.

“You look just as you used to look,” he said immediately, in his old candid, blunt fashion. “You have not changed.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure of nothing. I wished to see you — it is a good many years. May I come up there? Don’t move.”

“It is — a good many — years.”

“Don’t get out of the hammock. I like to see you there. You have not altered. I thought you would have aged. I have.”

“Yes; I see. You look ill.”

“I am not ill, but I am worn out. I have had care and trouble. My daughter died in July.”

“ *Oh!* I did not know. It must have followed ” —

“ Yes ; she wore herself into this, taking so much care and all that nursing. I could not prevent it. Her mother’s sickness was a painful one. It cost two lives.”

Corona, after a moment’s hesitation, held out her hand quite in silence ; words could not have carried what it seemed idle to call sympathy, and yet what she could call nothing else. He took her hand with evident gratitude ; that trifling sign seemed to receive him ; he drew a chair beside her hammock and sat there, unbidden, looking down.

“ I am coming to Fairharbor to stay for a few weeks at the hotel — if I may,” he began again.

“ Fairharbor does not belong to *me*.”

“ I thought it did. But I will not stay if it be objectionable to you. I don’t wish to intrude on you. I never did. You know that.”

“ How could it matter to me ? ” said the woman, quietly. She glanced at her empty

house, at the lonely shore ; she did not look at her old friend.

“ That is a characteristic answer. I suppose it may be — this time — an honest one. I am honest, too. I came down here worn out, as I tell you. I wanted rest, and the ocean. When I got here I found you were here. So I came to see you. This is the truth.”

“ Is it ? ”

“ The holy and the whole. Do you mind having me for a neighbor for a while ? ”

“ I don't know whether I do, or not. It had not entered into my plans for the season. . . . I'm sorry for you, though ! You are in affliction. You show it.”

“ You are just the same as ever ! ” he broke out in a ringing voice. “ You have n't changed either for worse or for better. You have kept all those ways you had ” —

He laughed a little ; in the nervous, half-boyish manner of a lonely man who has been traveling some time, and is glad to have somebody to laugh with, or even to laugh at.

This laugh seemed to surprise Corona. At first she frowned at it ; then, before she knew what she was doing, she had shared it. The laugh cleared the atmosphere somehow ; laughter, like tears, can be a powerful conductor ; and Corona, rising to lift herself upon one arm in the hammock, looked straight into his face.

“ Will you tell me what it is you want ? ”

“ A neighbor — a comrade ; gentleness ; and to be understood,” he said, eagerly ; not in the paltry tone of a man who would protect himself, but in that of one who fears lest he should overstep, “ perhaps to sit on your piazza now and then. I shan’t bother you. There might even be something I could do — some service. Is n’t there some tinkering about your house — some odds and ends that a man — But I suppose you have learned to do all these things for yourself.”

“ I have learned to do a good deal for myself.”

“ You always did. You began so. But I would n’t be in your way, you know.”

“I suppose,” said Corona, slipping to her feet, and lifting her serious eyes again to his, as the two stood so near and so separate, in the grave approach of their middle life — I suppose you refer to what is called friendship.”

XII.

RECEIPTED BILLS.

“SOMETHING of that kind, I suppose,” he said.

“At our age,” he added, “people ought to be able to get on.”

“I am sorry for you,” she repeated. “You are a bereaved man. It is my nature to be very sorry. But I had not thought of making — new friends.”

“A new friend! Pretty old one, Corona. Have you forgotten?”

The woman gave him an inscrutable look.

“In middle life,” she said, “memory is always a selection.”

“I know we did n’t get on then,” he urged, “but” —

“Whose fault was that?” she flashed.

“Was it mine?” he cried.

“Was it mine?” she demanded.

They separated, walked the length of the piazza, and returned, and stopped beside each other; both showed agitation; but the woman not a symptom of tenderness. It was he who renewed the duel.

“I only asked the place of a neighbor and a friend; old or new, as you choose; the sense of not troubling — any one; the knowing that I was welcome; and not to be always running against the thorns in your fragrance.”

“You always talked about my thorns! You told me I was like that Indian tree whose flowers were so — so beautiful; but a man tore his heart out before he could gather them. That was one of your pointed speeches. You made several.”

“I thought it was *you* who said those things. You have n’t lost the faculty, I see. . . . How you look in that white stuff in the white light; and how red that shawl is! I don’t see that you have grown older in the face by one day or night, since we used to battle so.”

"We always quarreled. We always shall. Don't let us try anything of any kind any more. Let the old gunpowder — and the old wounds — go where all old emotions go. I have lived without your friendship, sir, a good many years !"

"I have learned to do without it," she added.

"Are you sure you could n't learn to do with it ?"

She shook her head.

"We are not the same. We are different people. Our lives lie between us. You have become a widower ; and I, an old maid."

She said these words as if she laid down a finality in the classification of species ; a set of terms beyond which evolution ceased. He smiled ; but she did not.

"It was you who did it !" he said, below his breath.

She made him no reply.

"You *could* do it, too !"

"And you could go out West and marry !"

"I am a man," he said.

“And I a woman.”

“You told me I was a friend with one letter left out. It was the second letter too. Do you remember that?”

“And you told me there was an antagonism between us. You said I kept it up.”

“And *you* told *me* you’d rather I had been drowned yachting that summer than to have lived to say something or other I said to you one morning.”

“I remember that. I meant it, too.”

“I don’t doubt you did. You meant them all. You were the loveliest woman I ever knew — and the cruelest!”

“I was young, then,” said Corona, in a lower voice.

“We are both of us older,” he said, more gently.

“Puelvir is coming home,” said Corona, after a pause. “She will be shocked to find me talking with a gentleman so late. There is not a soul in the house, you know. She will think she ought to bring her knitting-work and sit on the piazza with us.”

“Puelvir? She is — perhaps — your chamberone?”

“Puelvir is my cook. We live together by ourselves. I am very fond of her. She makes me quite happy.”

“Ask Puelvir if I may come over and see you to-morrow; will you?”

“Just as a neighbor?”

“Just as a neighbor.”

“And what you call a friend?”

“Yes. What I call a friend.”

“Not to quarrel or be terrible, as you used to be?”

“To be different, as I have learned to be, Corona. But whether we quarrel — that’s for you to say. It always was.”

“There you go again! We shall come to the bayonet’s point in five minutes. I’m afraid it’s in us. I’m afraid we can’t *help* it. And, you see, I’ve learned so well, so very well, how to live without you.”

“But you’ll *ask* Puelvir, won’t you? There’d be no harm in *asking*; would there?”

“N-n-no,” said Corona, slowly. “Perhaps not. I will ask Puelvir.”

It was a matter of keen surprise to Corona — who, as may be remembered, had long since ceased to expect things — to find that a neighbor made a difference. Absolutely it did make a difference in life. To stir in the morning, turning the opening eyes upon the rising tide, and remember that something was going to happen to-day — this was a strange matter. To lock the doors at night — how much later than she was used need not be specified — and shut herself in by the moon-lit windows, and watch the water ebb, as thought was ebbing after flood, and say, “I have had a pleasure to-day,” or, “I shall have another to-morrow,” — this, in Paradise, was a novelty. To be watched as she moved about on little errands, to be understood in trifling things, to have small wishes respected or even forestalled; to share a drive, a walk, a poem, tea, a full moon, a high tide, a letter, or an anxiety — to this grave and quiet comradeship our sunny-hearted old maid adapted

herself with the calm content of one who wished for nothing more than this ; and who had so long lived on infinitely less that she could readily lay it all down again when the time came, and fall back upon her apprenticeship of solitude, as people whose health fails in a higher avocation fall back upon a trade learned and stored away in the brain cells long ago.

Nothing was more amazing than to see the stir that a man made in this later Paradise. Did the woman in that other make more? It was a discovery to Corona that a man could be put to so many intelligible uses. It seemed incredible that a lock could be tinkered, a slat mended, a blind hung, a loose nut discovered in an axle without riding six miles and paying two dollars to achieve these high domestic ends. The mysteries of shoeing and shorts assumed now a clearness amounting to the commonplace. It was no longer found necessary to keep the oat-barrel in the pantry because the horse eat it up nights in the barn ; methods of solving this problem evolved them-

selves, one knew not how. Even that delicately balanced question, the precise length at which you could teach Zero to tie a halter so that the Lady could lie down if she wanted to, and yet not break her leg if she did n't want to, was disposed of with what seemed to be superhuman ease. So strange, and never the less strange, it grew, to have a man in Paradise.

To Puelvir the novelty presented what we are accustomed to call the other side of a question. Puelvir was not happy. Between the guest and the serving-maid existed a fixed lack of sympathy, such as was accepted between Matthew Launcelot and the Lady of Shalott. One evening, when they were locking the house at the abandoned hour of half-past ten, Puelvir said, stiffly, to her mistress, —

“ I turned off the raspberry man for *you*.”

“ Dear me, Puelvir ! What can you possibly mean ? ”

Corona turned her laughing face, in which the passing youth had been captured in these

pleasant days—it was amazing how young she could look! — Corona turned her bright eyes upon the sober, faithful creature to whom “what is called friendship” had not happened.

“I mean what I say,” said Puelvir, looking gray. “And them two widderers besides. I never thought it of you, Miss Corona, that you ’d go back on *me*!”

Puelvir wiped two strange, big tears from her gaunt cheeks. She said no more. She felt that she had exhausted the deepest subject of her life.

“Puelvir! Come here, Puelvir! Do you think — did you suppose — have you imagined” —

“My folks give me common senses when I was borned to ’em. There hain’t no lunatics in our fambly; nor half-witted ones, neither. We ain’t eddicated, but we ken learn our multiplication table. Some of us got so far as the spellin’-book.”

“But, Puelvir, upon my word of honor, I have not once *thought* of such a thing; I am

not — it is too late for that, Puelvir. I have no intentions in that direction, whatever. I like my way of life better as I am. Even if I did n't, the man does n't live who could part me from you, Puelvir. You've stood by me — you've made my lonely home a comfort to me. You might have known I would appreciate it."

"I never done it to be appreciated," beamed Puelvir. She wiped her eyes and took to her dusting vigorously. Her homely face shone.

"You must understand the case, Puelvir. This gentleman is nothing but an old friend. He will never be anything else to me. I can't help being kind to him, Puelvir; for he is in such trouble" —

"Think so!" said Puelvir. "Acts like it!"

"And he is such a very old friend" —

"Hm-m-m-m!" said Puelvir, solemnly. "So that's what you call a friend is it? You'd ought to know your own business. It ain't my place to free my mind; I know it ain't. I don't move in the upper classes, nor

I never did. But among *my* kind of folks we call it keepin' company. Lord bless you, Miss Corona, anyhow," added Puelvir. "Call the creetur what you like. 'T ain't no odds to me what name you give him, so long 's he don't part us and amuses you. He might as well make himself useful someways. I don't doubt it's the first time in his life; you ken tell him I said so, if you want to."

He did make himself useful, in particular about that burglary. With such masculine vigor did he approve of Corona's determination not to pursue the search for her property that he effectually crushed whatever recapitulation of her decision Messrs. Hide & Seek or feminine frailty may have suggested.

"Stop where you are," he said. "Stop just here. It is like spiritualism or faro. You will be drawn on by the invisible delusion of the game, if you suffer it. You have done the sensible thing. Now stick to it. Let me see your bills for this affair, may I? Suppose we go over it together."

Corona had her lap full of bills; receipted

bills; a frowning pile, built since the burglary. With a merry laugh, she tossed them over. How amusing was care, with some one on the sofa to make light of it!

He took the bills, ran his eye over them, took out his note-book and stylograph, and quickly did a sum in addition; whose items he read aloud to Corona as follows:

For printing circulars	\$27 55
Postage	4 50
Travel of police18 72
Detectives	225 37½
Travel of police	2 35
Advertising83 25
Agent to New York50 00
Omnibus ticket to Judas Johns	25
Telegraphing	5 10
Travel and sundries65 27
<hr/>	
Total	\$482 36½

“It is a pity,” said Corona, after a pause. “Can’t we make it up to \$500 any way in the world?”

“I’m afraid not. I’ve tried. It is a pity.”

“I see but one course open to me,” said Corona, brightening. “I must give a party. I must give a party to Mr. Pushett and those gentlemanly persons on the State force, and Mr. Hide and Seek, and — oh! Mr. Judas Johns, and the officers of the Fee-Fi-Fum and I. O. U. I must invite all my fellow-creatures who have so nobly contributed to the recovery of my property. That would easily bring it up to \$500, don’t you think? We might call it ‘The Detective Detected,’ or some other of those fashionable titles. It would be a pleasant domestic scene.”

“I’ll churn the ice-cream for you. May I? You don’t know what ice-cream I can make. I put a little pepper in it.”

They looked at each other merrily, laughing at their protoplasmic wit, as contented people laugh at little things.

“On the whole,” said Corona, “there is an obstacle. My guests would all have to have their traveling expenses paid, I suppose. That goes without saying. At the last moment some of them would telephone: ‘Send

\$75 more, and I'll come.' I'm afraid it would mount up. And over \$500 I don't see my way to go. I think we must abandon the party."

She gathered up all her bills, and filed them away in silence. He sat and watched her.

"I wish," he said at last, in one of those tentative tones which might pass for jest or earnest, as the speaker chose, or as the hearer decreed — "there is one other bill I wish I could see receipted in full. I suppose you think you *have* one against me? I wish you did n't. But I'm afraid you do."

She made no answer to him just at that moment. She felt choked. How should he understand? How could he? No man who could have let it all happen as it had *could* understand. Deeper than ever delusion sounded, she knew this; for then, for now, and for all time.

Through her musings, as she sat there silent still — for what had she to say? — there ran in characters fantastic the items of

that other account, kept in the ledger of a woman's heart, by the stern book-keeper, Time, who makes no false entry, and accredits or discredits to the fraction of the bitter or the blessed truth : —

—— ——— to —— ——— Dr.

For putting a woman where she could not speak for herself.

For not comprehending what she did n't say

For believing what she did.

For her suffering more than he was worth.

For her not minding whether he was worth it, or not.

For fifteen years of separation.

For her living alone till she had rather live alone.

For sundries which cannot be recorded, and should n't, if they could.

Received payment in full, ———.

“No, no !” cried the woman. “No ! It can never be done.”

“I begin to see it all a little differently,” he urged, gently. “I don't say that I did n't make mistakes. I should like — In your book-keeping, Corona, are not old debts outlawed, sometimes ?”

She smiled, and shook her head ; and then she shook her head, and smiled again. They would be good friends, she said ; that was much to be ; but for that other record, turn the page, and speak of it no more.

He spoke of it no more ; at least, not then. He was grateful to be her neighbor, her comrade, and to serve her as he could. By that ancient ladder, the golden ladder on which the angels of trust and sympathy ascend to human hearts — by the old, old ladder of Friendship, had the most dangerous house-breaker of all climbed up to Paradise ?

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